Guitar MAGAZINE

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ISSUE 368
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THE OFFSET ISSUE

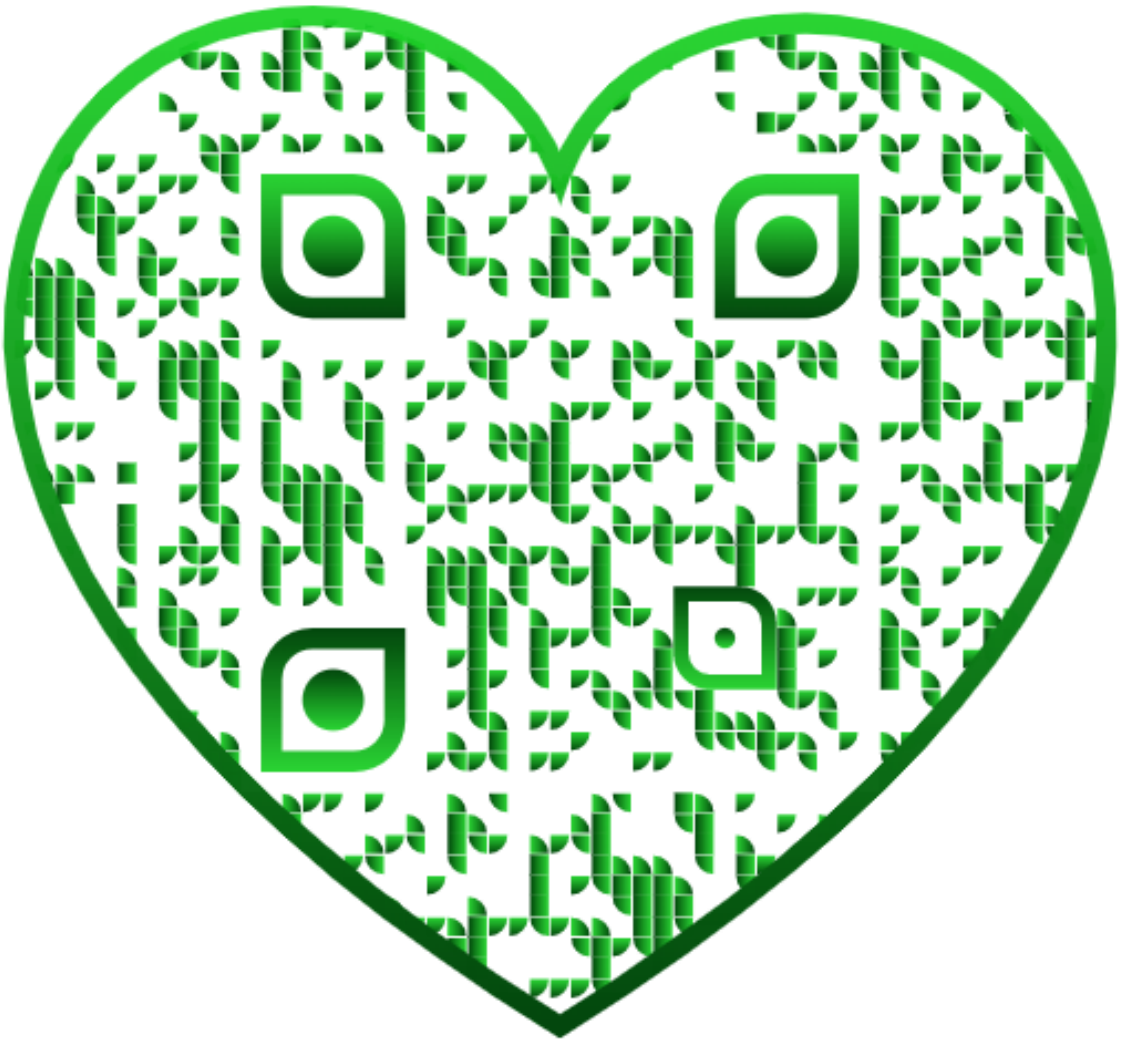
45 REASONS WHY OFFSET GUITARS RULE

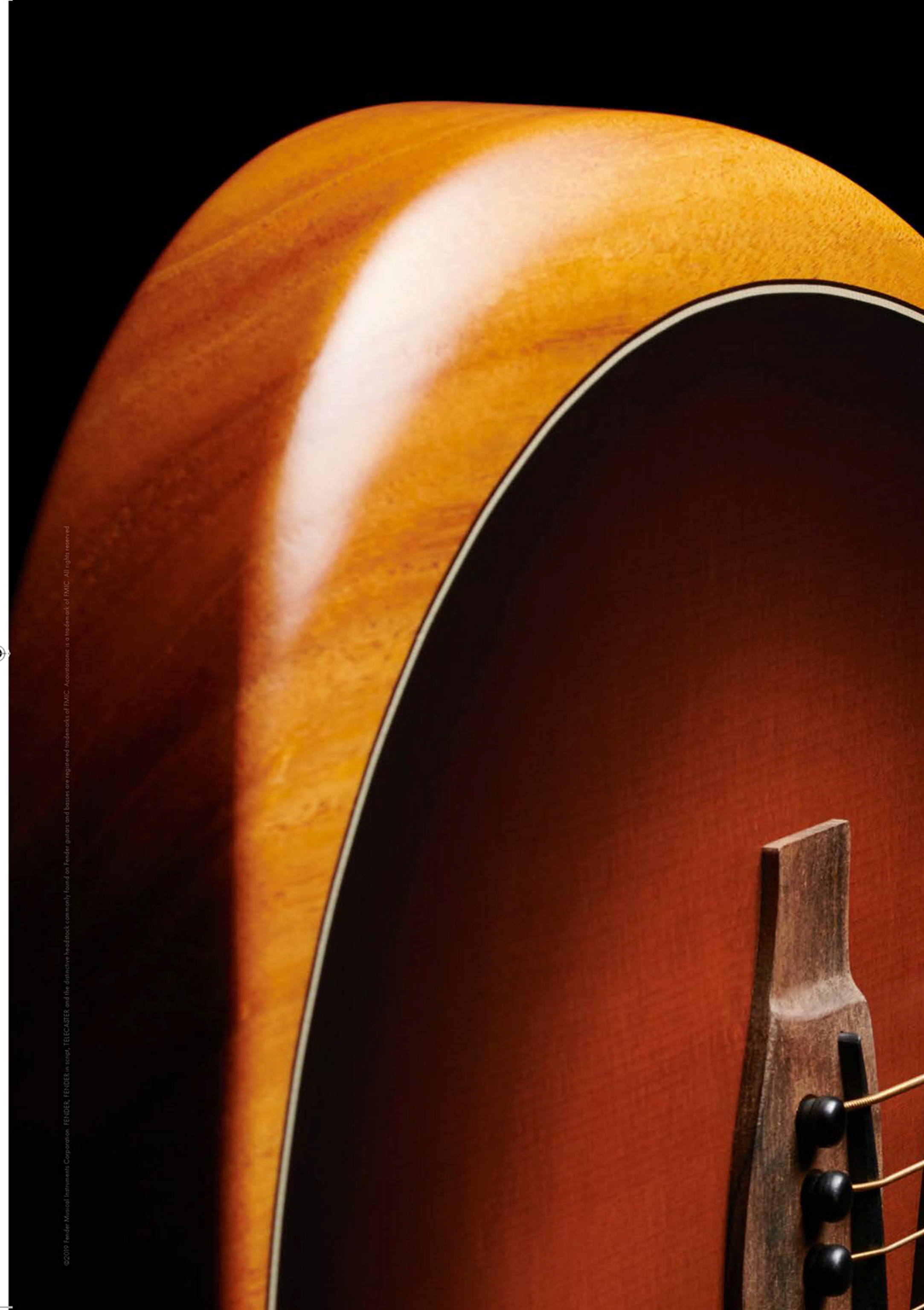
- ESSENTIAL MODS
- KILLER TONE TIPS
- MUST-HEAR PLAYERS
- BUYER'S GUIDE
- FANO ON OFFSETS

MARSHALL STUDIO SERIES
THE DEFINITIVE REVIEW

LARKIN POE
ON GUITAR TELEPATHY

McCARTNEY GUITARIST
BRIAN RAY'S
AMAZING COLLECTION





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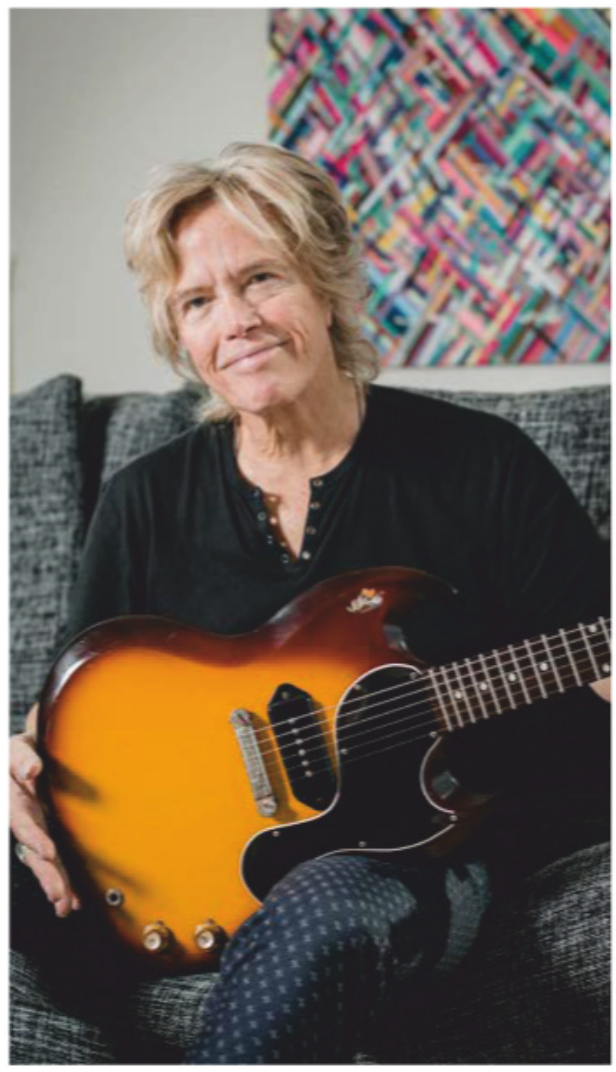

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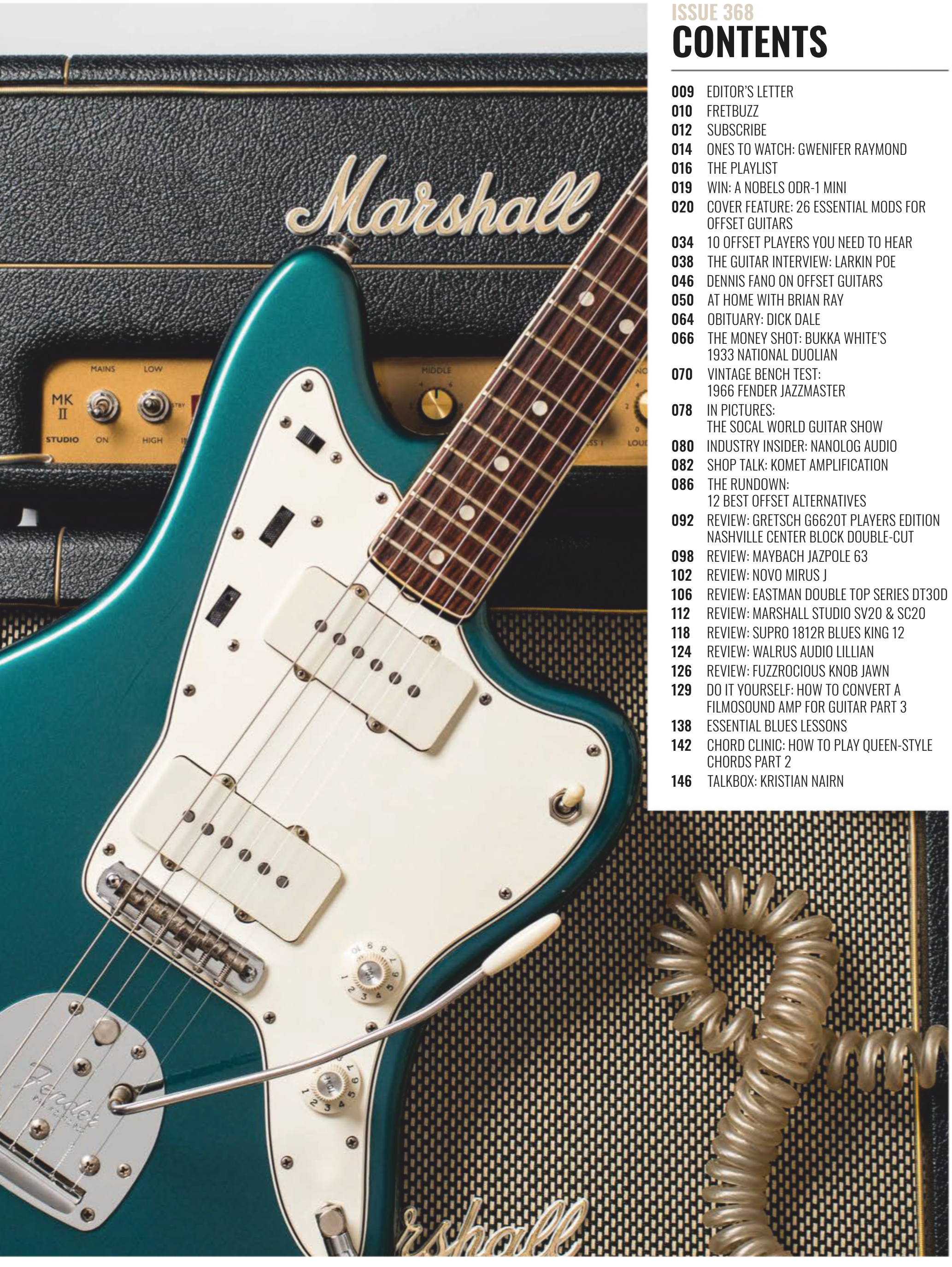

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EDITOR'S LETTER

FROM LEFT TO CENTRE

It all started with Nirvana. It was 1995 and I was 14 years old – already a year too late to actually see the band in the flesh. Instead, I wore out VHS tapes of their incendiary live performances. Unlike the Metallica and Guns N' Roses material I'd tried to get my fingers around on a £17 catalogue guitar a few years earlier, it didn't take long to work these songs out. And once I did, I *had* to form a band, immediately.

By far the coolest guitar onscreen was Kurt's heavily modified, left-handed 1965 Fender Jaguar. With those DiMarzio pickups and all that gaffa tape and chrome, there was something alluring and dangerous about this mongrel instrument that seemed to explode in his hands.

That was the first time an offset-body guitar really appeared on my radar. Later, it became clear that there was a common thread of rebellion and outsider status running through the players I began listening to who gravitated towards these guitars – J Mascis, Elvis Costello, Thurston Moore – and I also realised the reverb-drenched twang and tremolo throb of surf music was powered by the very same instruments.

Here in 2019, thanks to the Instagram generation, offsets have never been more mainstream. 'Jazzmaster' is one of the most frequently searched terms on buying sites and an almost innumerable array of boutique builders have sprung up touting their takes on Leo's oft-misunderstood electrics. And Fender has more offsets in its catalogue than ever.

In this issue, we're celebrating all things offset with essential mods, tone tips, must-hear players, a premium-offset buyer's guide and more besides. We also get up close and personal with an insanely rare 1966 Jazzmaster in Ocean Turquoise and speak to the man who kickstarted the boutique offset trend before social media existed – Dennis Fano.

Finally, when it comes to outsider music, there's nothing more stark and evocative than the music of the Delta blues originators. Turn to p66 to see more of the guitar I'm lucky enough to be holding in the picture above: 'Hard Rock', Bukka White's 1933 National Duolian. 'Spine-tingling' doesn't come close… enjoy the issue and I'll see you next time.

Chris Vinnicombe
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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

© Melvyn May from *Tales Of Tone And Volume* by Bernie Marsden

SIGNATURE MODELS

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, I was intrigued to read the recent letter from a reader who was lucky enough to be able to get Joe Bonamassa to sign his guitar. My question is: if you find yourself in a similar situation, do you have any recommendations of what to use for the signature? I expect a pencil or biro would probably just slip across the varnished surface of guitar and felt-tip pen would just wipe off. And if you are able to obtain a successful signature, what can you do to preserve it? Just playing the guitar could risk wearing it off. Perhaps your panel of industry experts have some thoughts on this?

PAUL, CAMBRIDGE

Hi Paul, perhaps you could take a leaf out of Les Paul's book and carry around a nail specifically for this purpose? He would scratch his name onto guitars or plastic parts such as pickguards – see Bernie Marsden's 1952 Les Paul in the picture above for an example.

On a serious note, a permanent marker pen might work, but don't try to spray protective nitrocellulose lacquer over it afterwards, because the ink may well run into the lacquer and end up looking messy. If you do manage to get a conventional signature onto your guitar, it would be preferable for it to be signed in a position which doesn't get a lot of physical contact, such as the back of the headstock.

AGED CONCERN

Dear *GM*, we had some power tools delivered to work and they were all shiny and new, and I remarked that it wouldn't be long until they were covered in grease and muck and grime. Then I had the idea that in order to cut out the hassle, they should come 'pre-distressed', but thought to myself, "Don't be so stupid…" And yet we see pre-distressed guitars for sale. When will the world see sense that this is a stupid thing to do?

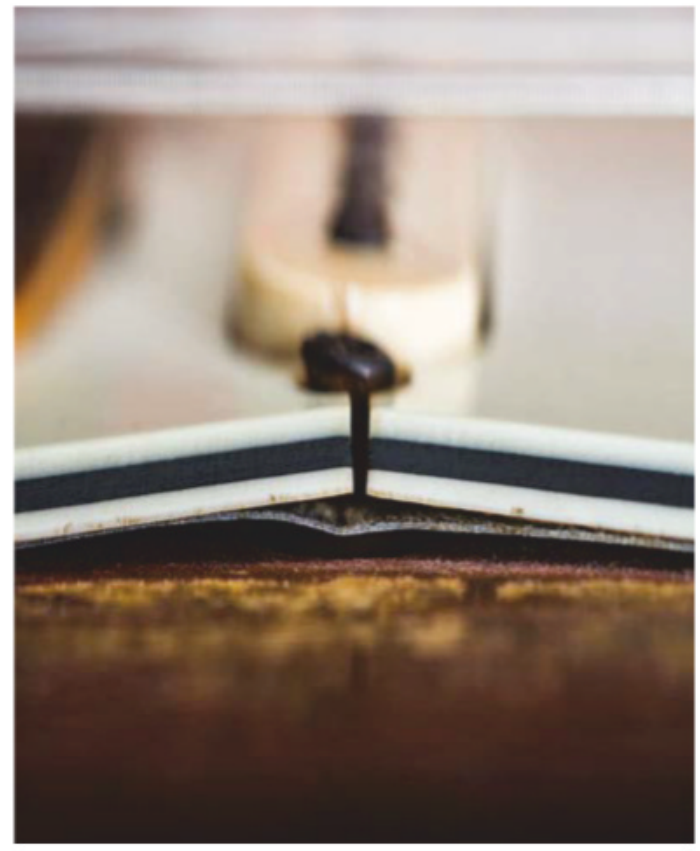
ANDREW S REDDING, VIA EMAIL

Well Andrew, given that artificially aged guitars, amps and even pedals have become widespread and affordable in the decades since the Fender Custom Shop popularised the concept, it's probably time to admit that faux distress isn't going away any time soon! We love the look and feel of an artfully aged guitar, but there are still plenty of pristine instruments available, too, should that be your preference.

TIME FOR A CLOSE-UP

I'm really enjoying the new format of *Guitar Magazine* – lots of great well-researched stories, articles, adverts and superb photos of new gear, old gear and displaying many kinds of finely crafted instruments, amps and effects in all states of elegance, build and repair. *GM* is the only publication that can make an enlarged photo of a standard strap button with a cross-head screw look sexy alongside bunches of coloured electrical wiring, fat capacitors and attractive banded resistors. My kind of magazine – looking forward to the next edition.

KEVIN BRAITHWAITE, VIA EMAIL



FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

Gary Moore, for me, had one of the best guitar tones ever recorded. I saw him play old guitars and new guitars through various Marshalls, Fenders and Soldanos, using many different pedals. Guess what – he sounded like Gary every time. The tone isn't in the guitar, it's in the player's hands and ears. Buying a CC#1 and a Bluesbreaker will help you look like Gary, but sure as hell won't make you sound like him.

NICK TOWNSEND, VIA FACEBOOK

You definitely shouldn't be afraid to experiment with pickup height. I had some strange slapback on my dream Strat recently, and nearly moved it on. But then a few turns of the screwdriver and it sounded killer again!

LUKE, VIA INSTAGRAM

Gibson made a really smart decision hiring Mark Agnesi. Mark is an icon, I cannot wait to see what comes out of Gibson next!

STEPHEN BEAVER, VIA FACEBOOK

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"I WAS ALWAYS ATTRACTED TO THAT ANARCHIC POWER OF THE OUTSIDER LOOKING IN – THE FALL, PIXIES, BUTTHOLE SURFERS, DYLAN, BEEFHEART..."

ONES TO WATCH

GWENIFER RAYMOND @GWENIFERRAYMOND

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Welsh multi-instrumentalist Gwenifer Raymond is a supernaturally talented acoustic player with a PhD in astrophysics and a day job designing video games…

What was it that first made you pick up a guitar?
"I started playing guitar at around eight or nine or so. I hadn't really had any interest in music before, but that year, my mother bought me a copy of Nirvana's *Nevermind* album. It was a totally revelatory experience and right away, I asked for a guitar."

Were there any other standout bands or artists when you started?
"When I was growing up, genre-wise, I'd say that I attended a pretty broad church, but I was always attracted to that anarchic power of the outsider looking in: The Fall, Pixies, Butthole Surfers, Bob Dylan, The Velvet Underground, Captain Beefheart, etc."

Why did you choose to move away from grunge and punk?
"At some point, I realised that a common influence for a lot of my favourite artists was early American blues. Off the back of Nirvana's cover of Lead Belly's *Where Did You Sleep Last Night* and a whole bunch of cheap compilation CDs, I found myself drawn in by those pre-war players who had an intractable, highly strange style to their playing which grabbed me more than the electric Chicago style. These guys felt like outsiders, with music as an involuntary expulsion, rather than some carefully curated presentation."

How did you come to play in what's been defined as this 'American Primitive' style?
"I had started to teach myself out of Stefan Grossman tune books, but I discovered a local guitar teacher who was a great blues player, so I started taking lessons from him. I started composing instrumental blues tunes, showed him a few and he introduced me to John Fahey.

"Fahey was playing instrumental guitar, too and it was completely mesmeric and articulate. From then on, I focused more on trying to express myself through instrumental composition."

Does your job as a video game programmer influence your writing?
"I think my work has an inverse effect on my writing. I spend a lot of time immersed in tech and thinking about technical details at a very deep level, to the extent where outside of work, I'm increasingly becoming a Luddite! Playing instrumental guitar is something of a meditative respite; there's no tech setup, you just start playing. It's a very unintellectual activity, as overthinking or careful consideration of it is often counterproductive to the process."

What's your main guitar of choice?
"My primary gigging guitar is a modern Gibson LG-2 American Eagle. In the past, I've used a lot of vintage guitars – the favourite in my collection being an 1890 Joseph Bohmann, gifted to me by Henry Kaiser – but the realities of regular gigging mean that I need something a little more hard-wearing."

Are you particular about the gear you use?
"I don't need a lot of gear, but I'm quite precious about what I use – I'm very particular about tone, as that's basically my voice and the only thing I'm relying on. Similarly, I'm very picky about strings, though I'm finding I can only get through about two shows before I kill a set!"

Your debut album was a critical success, so what's next for you?
"I'm also working on new material for album number two, which is an arduous process as I'll obsess over new tunes for a long time before I consider them finished. I've got a lot of festivals coming up in the summer and I'm playing more and more outside of the UK, so the coming year should be a pretty exciting one!" G

***You Never Were Much Of A Dancer* is out now on Tompkins Square**

THE PLAYLIST

© Giles Smith

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

LA DISPUTE PANORAMA

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Chad Morgan-Sterenberg of post-hardcore band La Dispute picks out his five guitar highlights from the band's fourth long player

Hailing from Grand Rapids, Michigan, La Dispute have developed into an artful, genre-bending and sometimes challenging band. Despite jumping from label to label, the band's blend of spoken-word and emotional rock music has gathered a devout following.

Now under the umbrella of Epitaph Records, the band have released a more autobiographical album, with frontman Jordan Dreyer's cathartic, twisted vocals underpinned by aggressive yet perfectly nuanced guitar melodies. Here, guitar player Chad Morgan-Sterenberg – now armed with a newly acquired 12-string Rickenbacker 330 – talks us through his use of three amplifiers and his favourite guitar parts on the new album.

ROSE QUARTZ

"At the end of the first track and throughout the second track, a low rumble sound arises that's a very important part of the record. It was created using a Korg Signal Delay from the 70s and an Ibanez rackmount unit from the 80s. This effects chain ended up being used on every song, becoming one of the glues that tied everything together."

FULTON STREET I

"This was the first song we wrote for the record and the first that we recorded. I had set up in the studio using three amps, a clean amp in the centre and two effects amps either side, which were receiving signal from the two rackmount units. This was the first time I had used delay effects on my guitar for almost 10 years! The result was a subtle pad-like texture that sat beneath and widened the clean guitar sound."

RHODONITE AND GRIEF

"We wrote this record almost completely in a room together, starting from the beginning and going part-by-part to create the structure of each song and how they flowed from one to another. This track I think is one of the purest examples of us just playing together. I was using a Rickenbacker 330 through a '68 Super Reverb the entire time we were writing and recording, which was a complete diversion from my usual setup."

VIEW FROM OUR BEDROOM WINDOW

"This song begins with some of the most explosive guitar sounds on the record, much of that thanks to the Rickenbacker 12-string that I picked up. I used the guitar for several overdubs on the record, but this track features it most prominently in the mix, giving it a huge open sound and almost a double-track feeling on the lead lines in the verse."

YOU ASCENDANT

"For this final track, I used a big Gibson dreadnought acoustic for the main guitar, making it very different from the rest of the album. We had mics on the acoustic in the room, and we ran the signal from the internal pickup into the effects amps. Out of a single performance we had more than a dozen recorded tracks, and it's one of the most distinct and prominent examples of the effects amps in the room." G

***Panorama* by La Dispute is out now on Epitaph Records**

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers…

PAUL MCCARTNEY
Come On To Me
McCartney's guitarist Brian Ray shows us his guitars on p50 of this issue. His latest work with the former Beatle is a rousing, guitar-laden track, with stomping lead lines.

LARKIN POE
Honey Honey
Americana duo Larkin Poe are interviewed on p38, and while you're reading, why not listen to this ghostly, twisted single from their fourth LP, *Venom & Faith*?

THE NATIONAL
You Had Your Soul With You
The indie-rock kings dropped a surprise single to announce the May release of eighth album, *I Am Easy To Find*. The single finds the Dessner brothers in experimental form, with glitchy, looped guitars to the fore.

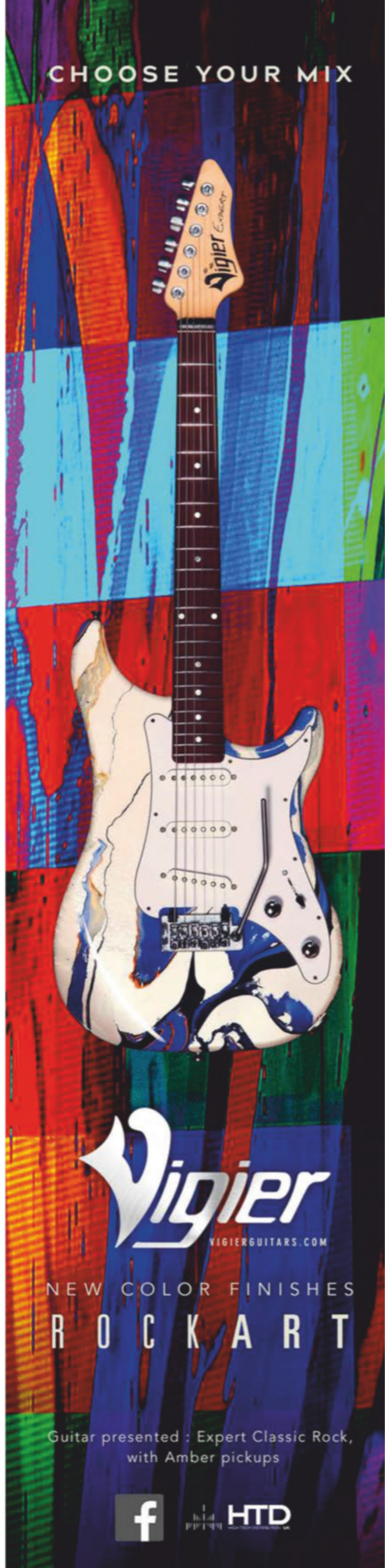
THE BLACK KEYS
Lo/Hi
The garage-rock duo are back with their first single in half a decade. Recorded at Auerbach's Easy Eye Sound studio, the song is reminiscent of the Keys' *El Camino* era, with a fuzzy, boot-stomping riff.

SUNDARA KARMA
Little Smart Houses
The Reading-based indie darlings have come out swinging on their sophomore album. This classic British indie riff is counterpointed with esoteric percussion and ominous vocals from Oscar Pollock.

BIFFY CLYRO
Modern Love
This single for Howard Stern's all-star Bowie radio tribute has been reimagined by Scottish rockers Biffy Clyro with the aggression and gusto of their earlier releases, and could easily fit on 2004's *Infinity Land*.

FOALS
Sunday
This third single from the Oxford act's new album, *Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost Part 1*, *Sunday* shows the band in a more sombre mood, before a rapid, charging riff arrives halfway through.

JOHN MAYER
I Guess I Just Feel Like
The guitarist has let his music do the talking of late, and his first release of 2019 is one of his best in recent memory. We guess he just feels like reminding us he's still one of the best electric-guitar players around…



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The Nobels ODR-1 overdrive has long been considered a secret weapon among session guitarists in the know. Now this heralded green stompbox has been reimagined in a pocket-sized form factor, and thanks to our friends at Nobels, you too can be as well prepared to drive your tone as the great Nashville session players by winning an ODR-mini, worth £95.

Designed in Germany, the original ODR-1 is known for its warm and natural drive, with a wide gain range and none of the bass rolloff or upper-mid pushiness associated with a Tube Screamer-type overdrive.

With the drive set at 10 o'clock, the ODR-mini growls into life with a sweet-sounding low-gain tone. There's a fair amount of compression, giving it the soft-edged feel of a TS9 or SD-1 – but, crucially, without the same colouration. As promised, the drive dial takes us all the way from mild crunch to roaring hard rock… with a little help from that intriguingly named Spectrum control. Increasing it adds brightness and gain without harshness, while dialling it back softens the top end of your tone for darker, more subdued textures. We can definitely conclude that this thing is smarter than the average green overdrive… G

Find out more about the Nobels ODR-mini at nobels.de or read our review on *Guitar.com* – to enter the competition, head to the link below and answer the following question... guitar.com/news/competitions/nobels

When was the original Nobels ODR-1 designed?
A 1985 **B** 1987 **C** 1995

The closing date for the competition is 12.00am GMT, 1 May 2019. Good luck!

TERMS & CONDITIONS

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WITH SYNCHRONIZED

THE MODDING CROWD

26 ESSENTIAL OFFSET-GUITAR MODS

Our essential tips for squeezing every last drop of performance out of your Jazzmaster, Jaguar or other offset guitar – covering everything from new bridges and pickups to vibrato fixes and supercharged electronics…

WORDS MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

ABOVE As this in-depth tips feature demonstrates, Fender's offset models are prime platforms for modifications and improvements

FACING PAGE From string mutes to a new vibrato unit design, a fresh approach to circuitry and a body shape optimised for player comfort, Fender crammed endless innovations into the Jaguar and Jazzmaster

Jazzmasters and Jaguars – and the many similar offset-bodied guitars they inspired – are tailor-made for modding. Not only do the players who gravitate toward them tend to be experimental types, the guitars' design begs for personalisation. Everything from hardware replacement to retrofitting non-standard pickups is par for the course in the world of offsets.

Here, we share some of our favourite alterations for these two great Fender instruments. Treat this article as a primer for your own ideas. And trust us, there are many more where these came from…

THE BASICS

1 STRINGS

Given that Leo Fender originally meant for these guitars to be used with the heavy-gauge flatwound strings of the day, installing a set of 0.011-0.048 or above will vastly improve the feel and response of your floating-bridge instrument. Tuning will be more stable, the vibrato will feel smoother, and the tone will rise like proving dough.

It's also a good idea to solder the finish wraps of your plain strings for extra durability in the event that they come into contact with the pivot-plate screws directly beneath them.

2 NUT

A properly cut nut is the first line of defence against pesky tuning problems. Even on a significant proportion of brand-new guitars, factory-stock nuts aren't necessarily slotted and seated properly. Have a luthier cut and shape a fresh one specifically for your instrument and string gauge, and you'll find that your guitar sounds and stays in tune better.

We recommend unbleached bone, brought to a high polish, for its hardness and beauty, but Tusq will suffice for those with a vegan lifestyle.

3 NECK PITCH

If you've ever looked at a Jazzmaster from the side, you'll see a solidbody guitar with the string geometry of an archtop; the strings flow from tailpiece to floating bridge, and then down an angled neck that rises off the body to meet them. Increasing the angle of the neck in relation to the body is the best way to get your guitar playing and feeling solid.

Fender accomplished this by using thin shims in the neck pocket, although a thin business card laid flat at the pickguard side of the neck pocket works just as well. Otherwise, full-size shims are available from guitar-part providers such as StewMac.

When you're happy with the amount of lift you've achieved, you can raise the bridge and pickups to compensate. With just a bit of maintenance, you can keep your stock bridge and stop worrying about skipping strings and poor intonation.

4 FLOPPY VIBRATO-ARM FIX

We call this the 'Hammer Trick'. A drop-in vibrato arm that won't stay put is a symptom of a poor fit between the arm and its collet. To remedy this, you'll need a vice and a hammer. Place the arm in the vice with about an inch of the inserted end poking out, then give it a good whack with a hammer. This will slightly bend the end of the arm, forcing contact with the sides of the collet. If it's still loose, perform the manoeuvre again; if it's too tight, turn the arm around in the vice and smack it from the other side.

NOTE This will only work with US-made instruments with the push-in arm.

5 LUBRICATION

Friction is the enemy of tuning stability, and lubricating each point of friction in the strings' path

will encourage them to return to pitch. There are various products on the market for this issue, but we found the humble tube of lip balm works, too – it's perfect for bridge saddles and nut slots. You'll only need a small amount of the stuff to keep your whammy-bar embellishments in line.

HARDWARE

Perhaps the most popular modification for offset Fenders is replacing the stock bridge with a more robust aftermarket part. Although a correct setup will make any Jazzmaster or Jaguar play dependably, we recognise that not everyone has the time or the ability to go to such great lengths. Many simply choose to change the bridge.

Chief among the many companies that design bridges are the US-based Mastery Bridge and UK-based Staytrem. Both have their adherents and detractors, so it's important to weigh the pros and cons of each bridge separately.

6 STAYTREM BRIDGE

If you like the original bridge, but want something more dependable, the Staytrem is a good and affordable option at £65.

Best understood as a heavily upgraded Mustang-style bridge, this bridge features six individually adjustable barrel saddles with a deep, centred groove to keep strings in place. It boasts nylon inserts on the saddle screws; this keeps bridge height stable and reduces the stock Fender design's tendency to rattle. The bridge is available in both 7.25- and 9.5-inch radii to match the curvature of your guitar's fretboard, and there's even a wider bridge meant for Bass VI models.

However, this bridge is meant to rock with trem use, which certain players may find problematic. Additionally, the fixed radius makes setups tricky for

guitars with flatter fretboards. Some opt for a generic Mustang bridge, but if you're going to go down that route, just spend the extra money on the Staytrem. Trust us, it's worth it.

7 MASTERY BRIDGE

Players who want a bridge that improves sustain and remains stationary with heavy vibrato use should consider the Mastery bridge – even though, at $175, it doesn't come cheap.

Designed and manufactured by Minneapolis luthier John Woodland, this is an overbuilt masterpiece of guitar hardware. It's machined and formed from stainless steel, and has oversized bridge posts that lock in with the guitar's body inserts to increase resonance and fix the bridge in a stationary position.

The gently radiused, twin brass saddles have a proprietary hard chrome plating and deeply grooved, V-shaped channels to keep strings put. Intonation is adjustable via two Allen screws for each saddle. Although some feel that the Mastery's enhanced resonance is antithetical to the classic offset sound, the needs of the player are paramount.

8 THE TUNE-O-MATIC BRIDGE

Here's a fairly common modification, but one that can cause more problems than necessary.

For one, installing them usually requires drilling out the body to accept new inserts. There's also the radius mismatch between the 12-inch-radius bridge and most Fender-style necks. This makes it difficult to achieve a balanced and consistent action across the fretboard. The shape of the saddles on these bridges can also prove problematic for those who use the vibrato frequently, although this can be mitigated with lubrication and additional filing of the grooves.

IF YOU HAVE A GOOD VIBRATO BUT CAN'T STAND DEALING WITH THE ARM FALLING OUT, STAYTREM OFFERS A REVAMPED ARM AND COLLET SET – FOR JUST £30

FACING PAGE Johnny Marr's signature Jaguar, released a half-century on from the original, refined the instrument for modern purposes and lovingly tweaked the design

VIBRATO

There's little reason to swap the tailpieces of vintage and US-made reissues, but with the following upgrades, owners of Japan-made Fenders and Squiers will note a marked improvement in tuning stability and feel…

9 VINTAGE FENDER VIBRATO UNITS

These are coveted by in-the-know players for the taut response of the original carbon-steel spring. Earlier 'Pat Pend' vibratos are especially favoured for their stiffer, smoother feel and they stand up far better to bends and detuning than modern recreations. These

PLAYERS WHO WANT A BRIDGE THAT IMPROVES SUSTAIN AND REMAINS STATIONARY WITH HEAVY VIBRATO USE SHOULD CONSIDER THE MASTERY BRIDGE

ABOVE The Offset Mastery Bridge, released in 2008, helps to eliminate the buzzing and string movement that plagued the bridges of original Fender offset models

units will often fetch well over $200 on the used market, though.

10 MASTERY VIBRATO

The Mastery feels almost identical to early trems, and can be had for around $180. But it shouldn't be thought of as a mere reproduction of those traditional bridges. A rugged affair made from stainless steel with countersunk screws, this modern-meets-vintage vibrato features an updated string anchor plate, an arm with user-adjustable swing, and, best of all, a painstaking recreation of the carbon-steel spring.

11 AMERICAN VINTAGE REISSUE

This is the same part as used on the AVRI '62, AV65 and American Original guitars – for guitars imported from outside the US, they're excellent choices. Price-wise, they sit between $70 to $90, which makes them an ideal upgrade for modders on a tighter budget.

12 STAYTREM VIBRATO ARM

If you have a good vibrato but can't stand dealing with the arm falling out, Staytrem offers a revamped arm and collet set – for £30 – that retrofits most existing tremolo systems and eliminates the woes of an untamable arm.

13 FACTION GUITARS HARD-TAIL PLATE

For a no-nonsense option that's all rock and no roll, consider a hard-tail plate from Faction Guitars. These custom-machined stainless-steel plates install quickly using the same mounting holes as the stock vibrato, enabling you to string your guitar using six keyhole anchors. A huge range of control plates is available, retailing from $45 to $80.

WIRING

14 POTENTIOMETERS

For as long as offset guitars have existed, people have complained that the stock 1 Meg volume and tone controls are too bright and trebly, especially with certain amp rigs.

Stepping down to 500K or 250K can drastically affect the overall tonality of the instrument, and the lower the rating, the greater the difference. 250K pots are standard in most Fender instruments, which makes them a good choice here – you know exactly what you're in for if you've ever played a Telecaster. 500K is

IN OUR MINDS, THERE'S NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN

holding a guitar and hugging a tree.

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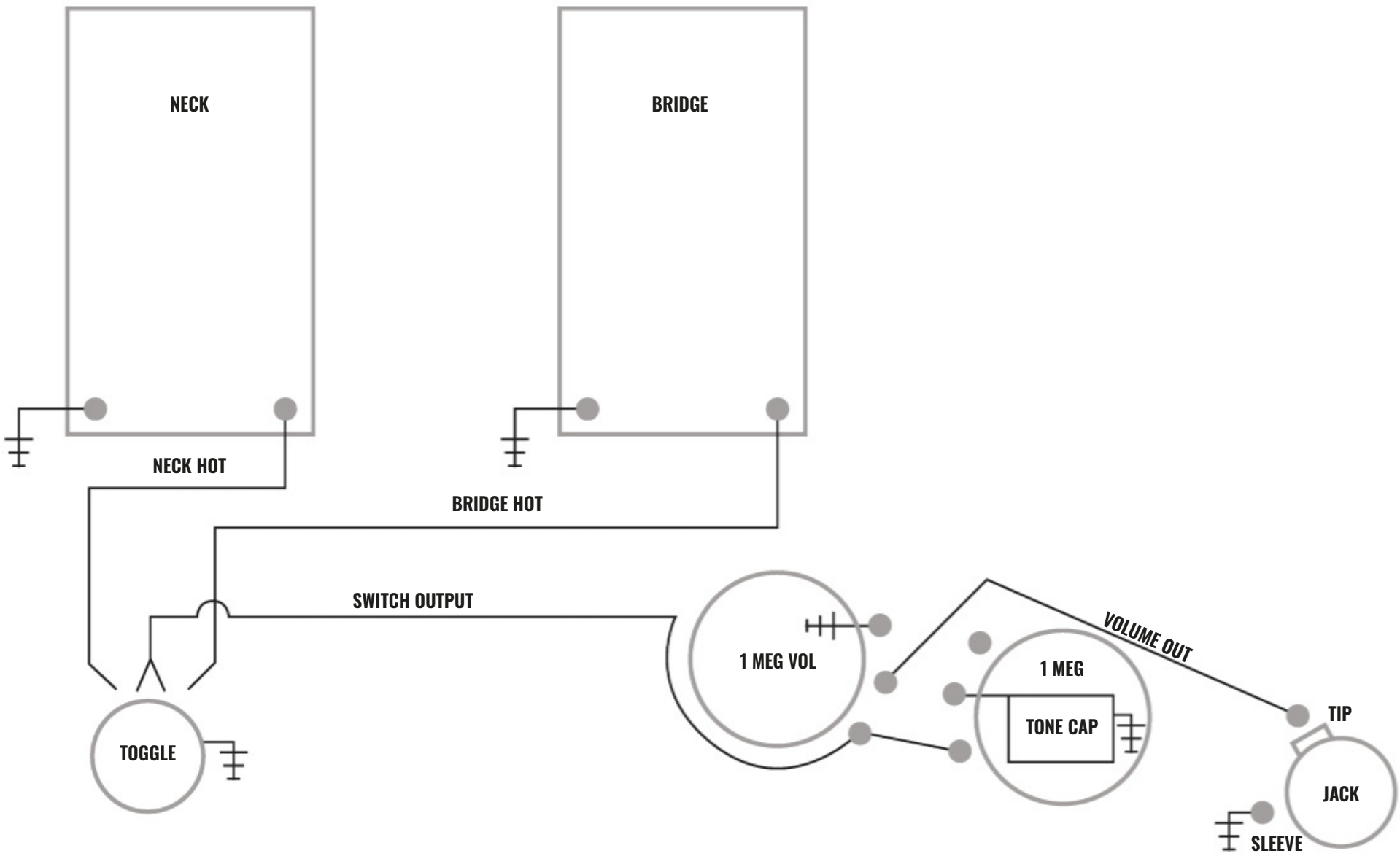
19
JAZZMASTER NO RC



SEYMOUR DUNCAN, CURTIS NOVAK, LOLLAR, THE CREAMERY, LINDY FRALIN, MCNELLY, KINMAN, HOUSE OF TONE AND MOJO ALL MAKE EXCELLENT PICKUPS FOR OFFSETS

ABOVE The wiring diagrams on this spread and the following pages offer a variety of ways to inject new sonic character into your offset

a great middle ground between them, rolling off some of the sting but retaining much of the bite of a good Jazzmaster pickup.

15 TREBLE BLEED

On the other end of the spectrum are those players whose style means that they rely upon consistent operation of the volume control – the Jazzmaster and Jaguar circuits may cut off far too much treble when backed off. Treble-bleed networks are an easy mod to retain clarity and bite without altering your basic guitar tone.

Placed between the input and output lugs of your volume pot, this mod consists of a cap in parallel with a resistor. They can either be bought from a number of vendors or DIY-ed. One popular combination is a 470pF (marked as 471) capacitor and a 220K ohm resistor, but some swear by a 220pF capacitor instead. Experiment away!

16 NEW CONTROL PLATE

The Jaguar control layout will always be confusing, but luckily, there are alternatives. Take, for instance, the Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar and its four-way blade switch, which represents a more intuitive approach to the guitar's arsenal of sounds.

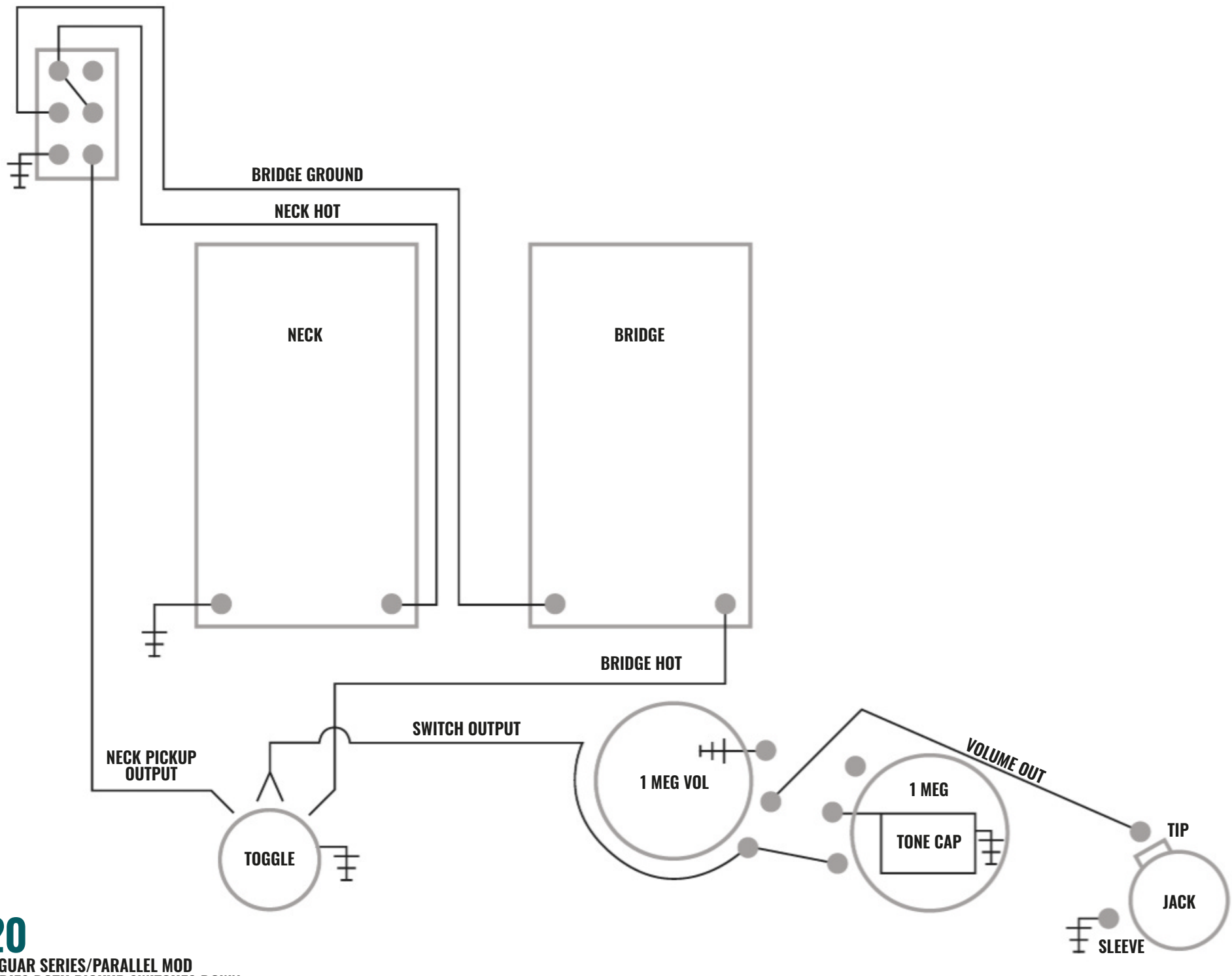
To retrofit a blade into a stock Jaguar, you'll need a new control plate like that of the Marr, or the diagonal 'Wronski' plate, so-named for guitarist Dave Wronski of the surf band Slacktone. Players who prefer a toggle switch should opt for the 'Cobain' plate, as seen on Fender's recent Kurt Cobain Jaguar model.

17 SPACERS

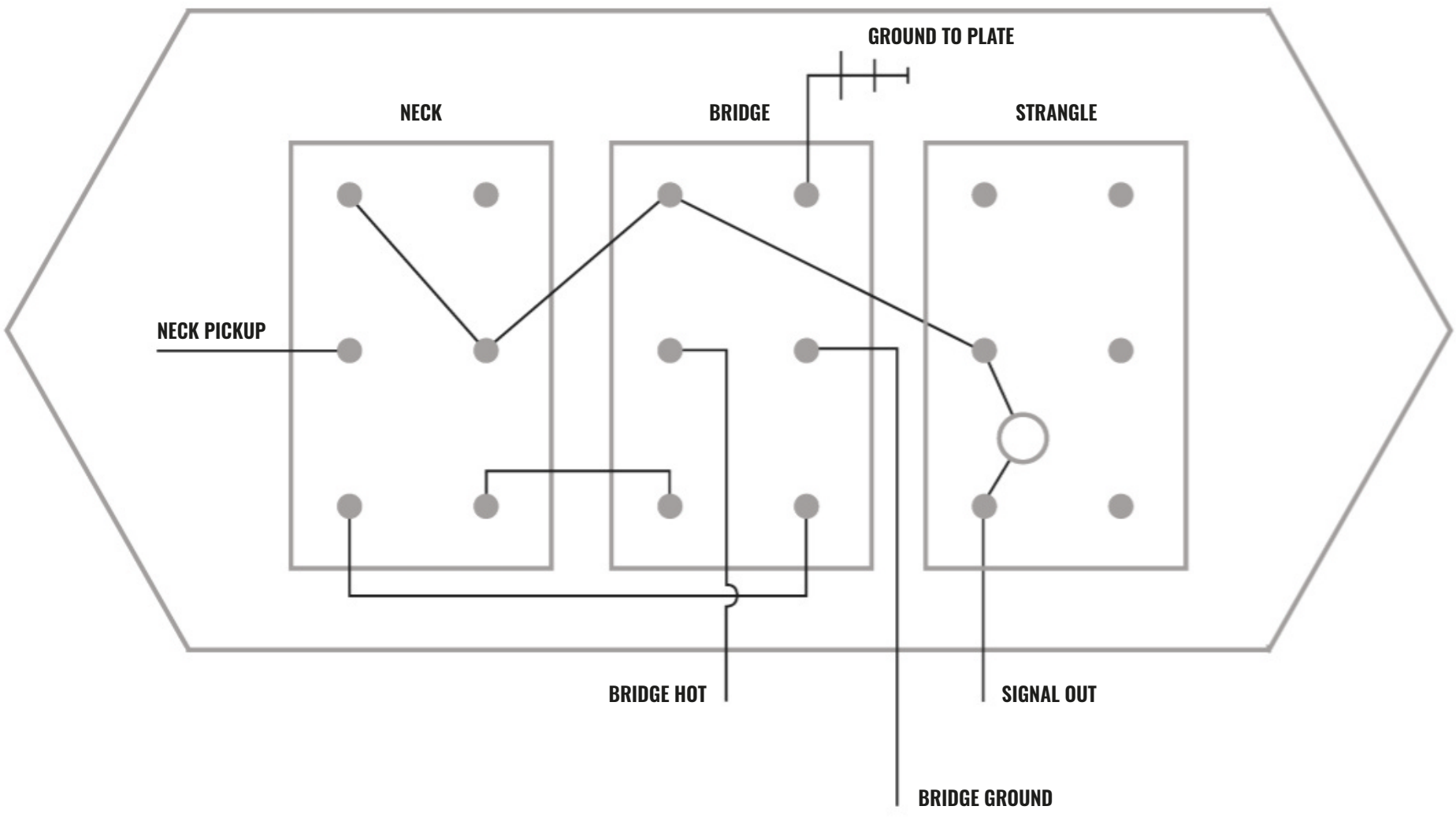
Another common complaint about those switches is that they're too easy to hit with even moderately energetic strumming. You could cram the end of a pencil eraser in there and break it off, but if you want to retain your tonal options while keeping the switches out of the way, spacers such as those sold by Faction Guitars are the perfect compromise.

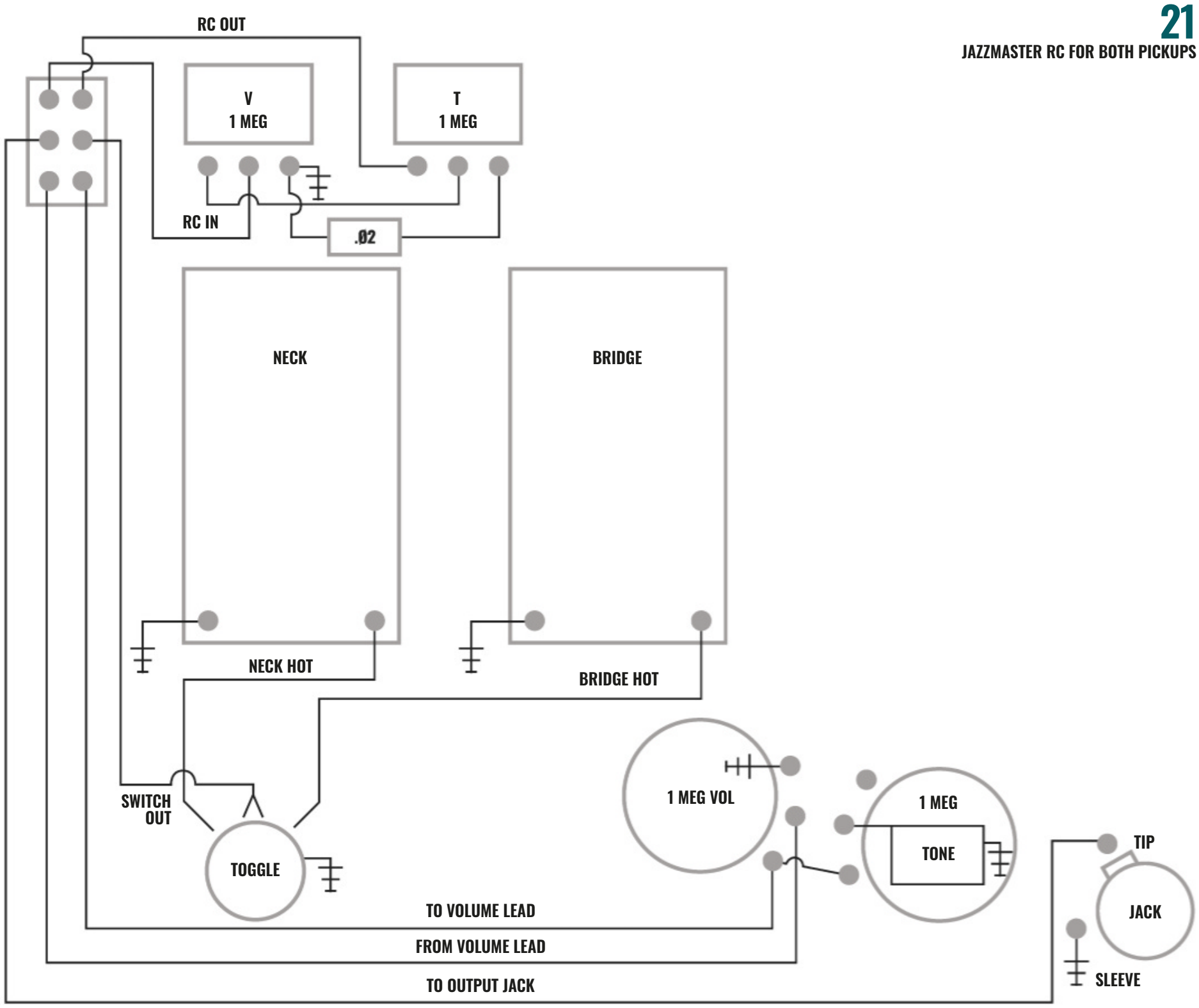
These spacers, priced at $4 each, fit between the switch casing and the pickguard or plate to which they're mounted, lowering the exposed tip of the switch enough so that it's tougher to hit accidentally.

20
JAZZMASTER SERIES / PARALLEL



20
JAGUAR SERIES/PARALLEL MOD
SERIES BOTH PICKUP SWITCHES DOWN





21
JAZZMASTER RC FOR BOTH PICKUPS

18 PICKUPS

The sheer number of pickup makers large and small out there in the guitar world means nearly every whim, within any budget, can be catered to. Seymour Duncan, Curtis Novak, Lollar, The Creamery, Lindy Fralin, McNelly, Kinman, House Of Tone and Mojo all make excellent drop-in replacements that cover a broad range of tones among them. P-90s, humbuckers, Wide Range, Gold Foils, sustainers… all are welcome here at the altar of the offset.

RHYTHM CIRCUIT MODS

In our recent piece praising Fender's rhythm circuit – which you'll find on *Guitar.com* – we made an impassioned plea for offset owners to employ those mysterious controls. Still, we're fully aware that even with experimentation, they won't work for everyone. Here are eight ways to make the most of your upper-bout electronics without dramatically changing the stock look.

NOTE These diagrams assume proper grounding for pots, switches, and the jack. Additionally, pay attention to which of your pickup leads are 'hot' and 'ground'.

19 CLIP IT!

Removing the rhythm from your circuit is fairly easy: simply re-route the neck pickup directly to the selector switch, the switch to the first lug of the volume pot and then the output from your volume pot to the output jack.

If you remove the secondary tone circuit to save some weight, then you may even find your tone improved with the streamlined wiring.

20 SERIES/PARALLEL SWITCHING

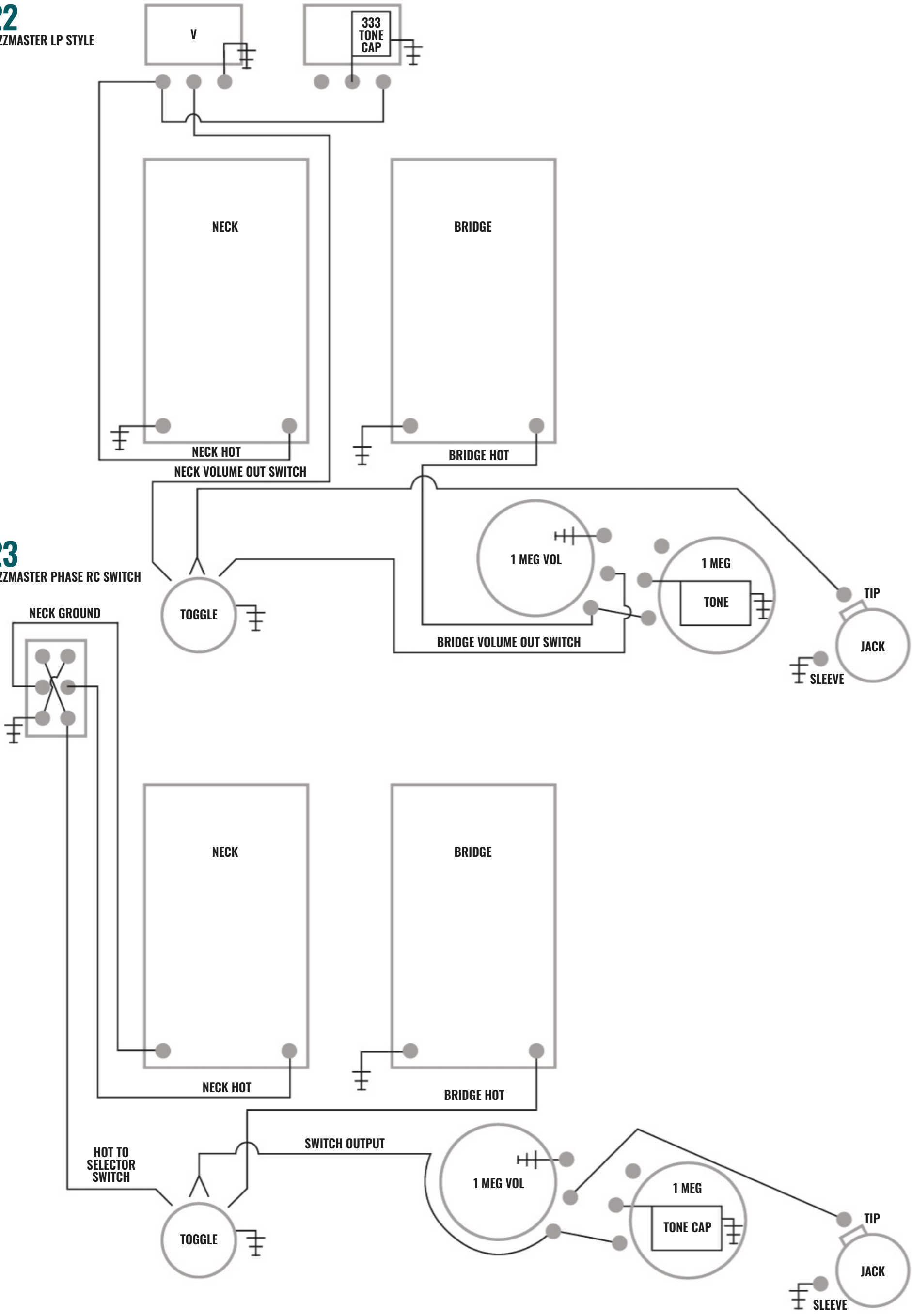
Repurposing the rhythm circuit switch to run your pickups in either series or parallel is a painless procedure. You'll only be using the switch, so either disconnect or toss the roller pots.

For Jaguars, here's a series mod that keeps the stock look. Note: You'll need to isolate the bridge pickup claw using a separate ground to the volume pot.

21 SWITCH IT UP

Instead of clipping the circuit, why not try to get more out of it instead? The rhythm circuit sounds great with the bridge pickup, so here's how to wire the guitar so that the toggle switch is still active. All pickup selections will now be available.

22
JAZZMASTER LP STYLE



23
JAZZMASTER PHASE RC SWITCH

BETWEEN THE BRIDGE AND VIBRATO LURKS AN OTHERWORLDLY PALETTE OF EERIE DISSONANCE, GHOSTLY REVERB AND PITCH-SPECIFIC RESONANCES

ABOVE The Jazzmaster's rhythm circuit is very much maligned and misunderstood. And as our wiring mods show, it's also ripe for reinvention

22 DEDICATED VOLUME AND TONE CONTROLS FOR THE NECK PICKUP

This Les Paul-like wiring scheme repurposes the rhythm circuit as a standard volume-and-tone combo for the neck pickup and substitutes the 50K Tone for a 1 Meg mini pot.

23 PHASE SWITCHING

Players who swear by thin and funky tones will love this one. Similar difficulty as series/parallel switching, with equally usable results.

24 PASSIVE TREBLE AND BASS CONTROLS

One of the coolest tricks up the proverbial sleeve of Leo Fender's other company, G&L, is the wildly usable passive treble and bass controls. Great for fattening up a thin sound or adding bite to a murky one, the PTB wiring has long been a secret of studio and stage alike.

We could draw up a diagram for this one, but honestly, it's just easier to direct you to Rothstein Guitars (guitar-mod.com), purveyors of fine and customised wiring harnesses for your favourite guitars.

25 ONBOARD EFFECTS

It's also possible to install an onboard effect, such as a fuzz or delay, in the cavity for the rhythm circuit. There's enough room for a small breadboard and a nine-volt, but be forewarned: you'll need to be an electronics whiz to make this work. Start with something simple like a Fuzz Face or Tube Screamer and move up from there.

26 BEHIND THE BRIDGE PICKUP

Between the bridge and vibrato lurks an otherworldly palette of eerie dissonance, ghostly reverb and pitch-specific resonances. Amplifying them can lead to some interesting textures, and for that you'll need a pickup behind the bridge.

This one's not for the faint of heart, we're afraid. Most pickup types require some wood to be removed, and you'll also need to devise an appropriate wiring scheme to activate the pickup, either on an unused rhythm switch, mini-switch or a push/pull pot.

Whether or not Mr Fender could have anticipated the eventual widespread embrace of DIY enthusiasts for his then-top-of-the-line models is up for debate. No matter the historical perspective, one thing is clear: even those with limited experience should feel right at home adding personal touches to their prized instruments. Happy modding! G

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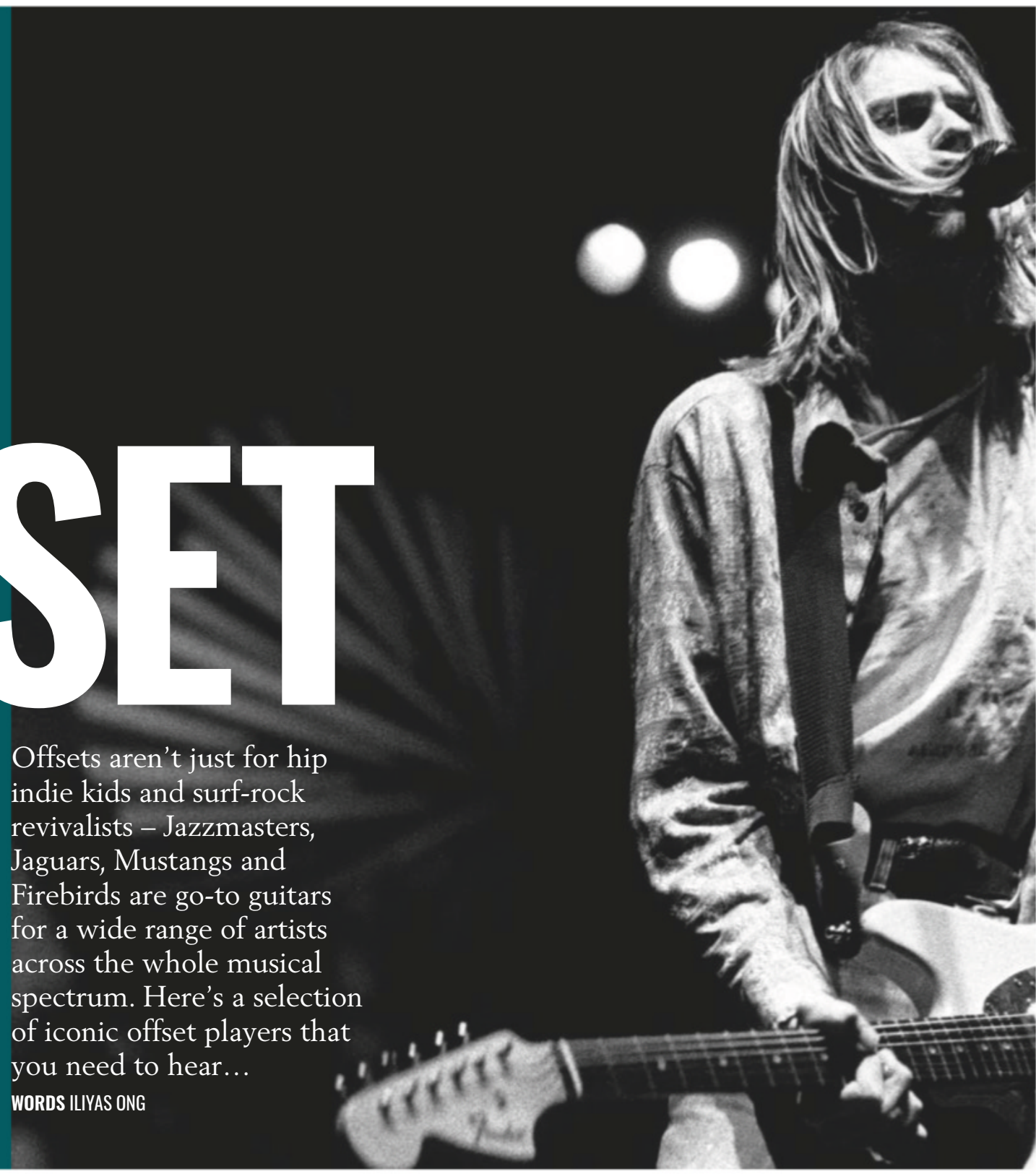
THE OFFSET SET



Offsets aren't just for hip indie kids and surf-rock revivalists – Jazzmasters, Jaguars, Mustangs and Firebirds are go-to guitars for a wide range of artists across the whole musical spectrum. Here's a selection of iconic offset players that you need to hear…

WORDS ILIYAS ONG

KEVIN SHIELDS

The My Bloody Valentine man didn't just play offsets – he changed the way they could be played. When MBV abandoned the goth-rock of their 1985 debut release *This Is Your Bloody Valentine*, it was Shields' unusual 'glide guitar' technique that powered the band's evolution into noisy shoegaze.

The band took two albums and a handful of EPs to hone the genre they helped pioneer. *Isn't Anything*, MBV's first full-length, and follow-up EPs *Glider* and *Tremolo* are like diaries of Shields' experimentation with his favoured Fender Jazzmasters and Jaguars. He had set out to create an "infinite horizon" of near-cacophonous guitars through a combination of open tunings, unique use of the offsets' floating vibrato and stacks of fuzz.

He would perfect these techniques on *Loveless*, and as a fitting tribute to the instrument that defined the record, a washed-out photo of a Jazzmaster adorns the album art. Even as he revitalised his sound with jungle- and acid-fuelled beats on 2013's *m b v*, it's impossible to look past Shields' most significant contribution to music: arguably the whole slackers-with-offsets trend sprang from his slouching shoulders.

ST. VINCENT

The 2019 Grammys turned out to be an unlikely victory for guitar aficionados. Rather than the mumble rappers and DJs who dominate today's charts, two electric six-strings snagged the leading roles at the ceremony: R&B starlet H.E.R.'s see-through Strat, and St. Vincent's funky offset-bodied Music Man signature.

The latter is much more than a showpiece instrument for Annie Clark, a player who stands shoulder to shoulder with the rock deities that came before her. Clark is known for her idiosyncratic new-wave chops that are as indebted to Elvis Costello as Prince, hence her MM's retro-inspired good looks and versatile triple-pickup configuration.

There are practical and symbolic rationales behind the Ernie Ball's unorthodox, retrofuturistic shape, too. One, it makes the guitar smaller and lighter – Clark has mentioned that she considers vintage-style Les Pauls and Strats, as great as they are, to be heavy and unwieldy.

Perhaps more significantly, it's an emblem of both St. Vincent's reverence for tradition and her desire to break out from it. "I made this guitar for players," she explained in an Ernie Ball video. "The design of the guitar… everything was incredibly purposeful,

© Getty Images

but it was also spontaneous in a certain way. The shape that I drew initially at the factory ended up being pretty similar to how [the guitar] ended up. You're honouring the past, you're taking the knowledge of various people who've cultivated and passed it forward. But you're also going, 'Cool, we'll take that. But let's do something else. Let's find out what's in the future.'"

Her quote mirrors what Kevin Shields had to say about the Jazzmaster body shape: "They knew how to make things look like they're going forward. It's kind of flying through space." All that from a guitar – before you've even strummed a chord.

CHRISTIAN FENNESZ

The Austrian artist may be more widely known in experimental and electronic-music circles, yet it's turbulent guitar work that underpins his prickly ambient compositions. A Kevin Shields fetishist, Fennesz swapped a Stratocaster for a Jazzmaster to record all the electric-guitar sounds on his 2008 opus, *Black Sea*.

Symphonic, vast and unsettling, the album is built upon guitars manipulated beyond recognition by digital plug-ins and custom-made stompboxes – a mesmerising mix of shoegaze, Brian Eno and Autechre. His collaborations with Ryuichi Sakamoto (*Sala Santa Cecilia*, *Cendre*) and the late Sparklehorse (*In The Fishtank 15*) are persuasive evidence that there's plenty of unfulfilled potential for the electric guitar beyond the rock arenas.

"I liked the tone spectrum of the Jazzmaster better and the way you could play behind the bridge," he told *Guitar Moderne* in a 2015 interview. "It is more of an improvising instrument, whereas you have to play the Stratocaster much more precisely to get great tone – the Jazzmaster is more forgiving. If you are a lousy player, it still sounds okay."

KURT COBAIN

The Nirvana man's love for the Mustang has been well documented in interviews, live performances and the posthumously released *Journals*. Cobain even went as far to admit it was his favourite guitar in the world – no idle talk coming from a punk rocker so hostile to the worship of gear.

One of his earliest Mustangs wasn't a Fender, but a Greco copy. He used that guitar and a Univox Hi-Flier during the *Bleach* era, then picked up his first Fender Mustang (a 1973 example) as Nirvana were touring in support of their debut LP. As legend would have it, that vintage Mustang – and the Univox Hi-Flier – met its demise at a 1989 gig in New Jersey. Later on, during the *Nevermind* recording sessions, Cobain started playing a 1965 Fender Jaguar and a 1969 Lake Placid Blue Competition Mustang with a matching headstock and racing stripe. Both these guitars became his trusted go-tos live and in the studio, and offsets soon became as synonymous with Cobain as his oversized cardigans were.

Around 1993, the grunge icon approached Fender with a cut-and-paste collage of a Jaguar and Mustang. Two prototypes of the Jag-Stang were built, but, sadly,

MAIN Kurt Cobain, the ultimate outsider guitar hero, used mongrelised offsets throughout his career, both live and in the studio

BELOW St. Vincent at End Of The Road Festival in 2018 with her Music Man signature model

© Getty Images

© Getty Images

ABOVE Sharon Van Etten at the 02 in 2012, the year she was introduced to her number-one Jaguar (note the strategic application of duct tape)

FACING PAGE One of the most iconic of all offset players – Elvis Costello cradles his Jazzmaster during the cover shoot for his 1977 debut album *My Aim Is True*

Cobain only used one of them for a handful of shows before his tragic passing in April 1994.

J MASCIS

Which slacker guitar child of the 90s *didn't* grow up on the *Feel The Pain* riff? And which one of them didn't, eventually, pine after the vintage Fender Jazzmasters that the Dinosaur Jr. guitarist towed out to all his gigs? He may currently use 1963 and 1965 Jazzmasters as his main and backup instruments respectively, but his love affair with offsets began when he purchased a $300 Jazzmaster back in the 80s.

"The only person I ever thought of with the Jazzmaster at that point was Elvis Costello," J said in an interview with Fender. "So I learned how to play the guitar [on it]. I used the whammy bar a lot for the songs I was writing, so it became part of my style. It kind of became my guitar because that's the only one I had. I bought other guitars over the years, but live especially, for the Dinosaur songs, I can only play the Jazzmaster."

Today, Jazzmaster and J are virtually synonymous. So it's only fitting that Fender chose to recognise the relationship with several signature Jazzmasters for the Massachusetts native: a sparkling purple guitar with a tune-o-matic-style bridge that appeared on his first-ever Jazzmaster, and a white Squier with a vintage-style bridge and an anodised gold pickguard.

PATTI SMITH

In her heyday, the proto-punk poet and leading lady of the Downtown Scene was fond of her 1957 Fender Duo-Sonic. The guitar appears in many press photos of Smith back in the 70s, and it was immortalised in the title track of her beatific 1976 record, *Radio Ethiopia*. "When I see Brancusi/ His eyes searching for the infinite abstract spaces/ In the rude hands of sculptor/ Now gripped around the neck of a Duo-Sonic," she screeches.

Sure, Patti isn't a 'guitarists' guitarist' in the traditional sense. That plaudit would have to go to Lenny Kaye, who played in the Patti Smith Group, and Fred 'Sonic' Smith of MC5, who collaborated with – and married – her. Furthermore, she's more occasionally spotted with an acoustic these days.

But for inspiring female guitarists such as Liz Phair (another Duo-Sonic user), Cat Power and St. Vincent, and for how effortlessly cool she looks with the guitar in those photos, we just had to save a spot on this list for her. Oh, and did we mention she also cut a record with Kevin Shields?

BOB BOGLE

Although Fender designed the Jazzmaster for jazz cats, upon its release in 1958, they weren't biting. So in their stead rode the surf-rockers, who took to the guitar's rad looks, thicker-than-a-Strat tone and eccentric 'tremolo' system – and at the crest of that new wave of guitar playing, you have Bob Bogle.

The lead guitarist and co-founder of The Ventures famously rocked a 1960 Jazzmaster, in Three-Colour Sunburst, with a 'slab' rosewood fretboard. You'll spy it on the covers of *The Colorful Ventures* and *The Ventures*, two of the Washington band's earliest records. But it was *Walk Don't Run*, the group's second single, that propelled the sound of the electric guitar – let alone the Jazzmaster – to the mainstream. In fact, George Blanda, former Fender Master Builder, admitted that *Walk Don't Run* was "the first song where I really understood what 'electric guitar' sounded like".

"The Jazzmaster has a certain sound that no other guitar has," Bogle's bandmate and rhythm guitarist Don Wilson said. "And that sound is so unique, so warm and yet tough. There's no guitar like this."

SHARON VAN ETTEN

Before her 2012 breakthrough album *Tramp*, Van Etten was predominantly known as an acoustic player. She got a hollowbody when she started writing "more aggressive songs", yet it wasn't until The National's Aaron Dessner recorded and co-produced *Tramp* that Van Etten found herself in the company of a Fender Jaguar. "He had a Jaguar, and I had never played one before," she recalled in an interview with Fender. "[Dessner and his brother] introduced me to the wonderful world of the Jaguar."

She picked up her current number one, a 1965 Jaguar, during rehearsals for that album, too. It was put on sale by the people Van Etten was sharing the space

with – and she bought it. "I felt like I lucked into it," she recalled. "I just fell in love with the tone, how it felt. It's solid and heavy – but it's not too heavy – and it has such an awesome, thick, lush sound."

The singer-songwriter is currently charting her way to mainstream success with latest record *Remind Me Tomorrow*. And that vintage Jaguar has remained by her side through the many gigs, studio sessions and TV guest spots. The guitar even starred in the third season of *Twin Peaks*, when Van Etten filled in for Julee Cruise on the Roadhouse stage.

PHIL MANZANERA

Neither Dave Grohl nor even the late great Johnny Winter can claim to be as obsessed with their Firebirds as the former Roxy Music guitarist Manzanera is with his Cardinal Red 1964 VII. He brandishes the Gibson on the *For Your Pleasure* inner sleeve, and, perhaps tired of the supermodels that grace most Roxy Music album covers, he even featured the guitar on the front of his solo record (which, aptly enough, is titled *Firebird V11*). Not bad for an instrument that cost him just £150 when he purchased it second-hand in the 70s.

While the art-rock band may be better known for Bryan Ferry's insouciance and Brian Eno's synth odysseys, Manzanera's own guitar experiments shouldn't be overlooked. He claims the Firebird VII worked well with effects, and on the first two Roxy Music records, you'll hear it distorted and mangled by Eno's VCS 3 synthesiser. *Primitive Guitars*, Manzanera's 1982 solo LP, pushed him further leftfield: all its way-out-there sounds, except the percussion and bass, were produced by guitars.

It took a pair of rappers to bring the underrated guitarist back into the public eye. Kanye West and Jay-Z took his solo track *K-Scope*, sampled a spidery riff and slowed it down to a grind. You'll hear the result – which Manzanera himself dubbed "genius" – throughout 2012's *No Church In The Wild*. That the tune also soundtracked the trailer for *The Great Gatsby* makes Manzanera's Firebird one of the most widely heard in recent memory.

ELVIS COSTELLO

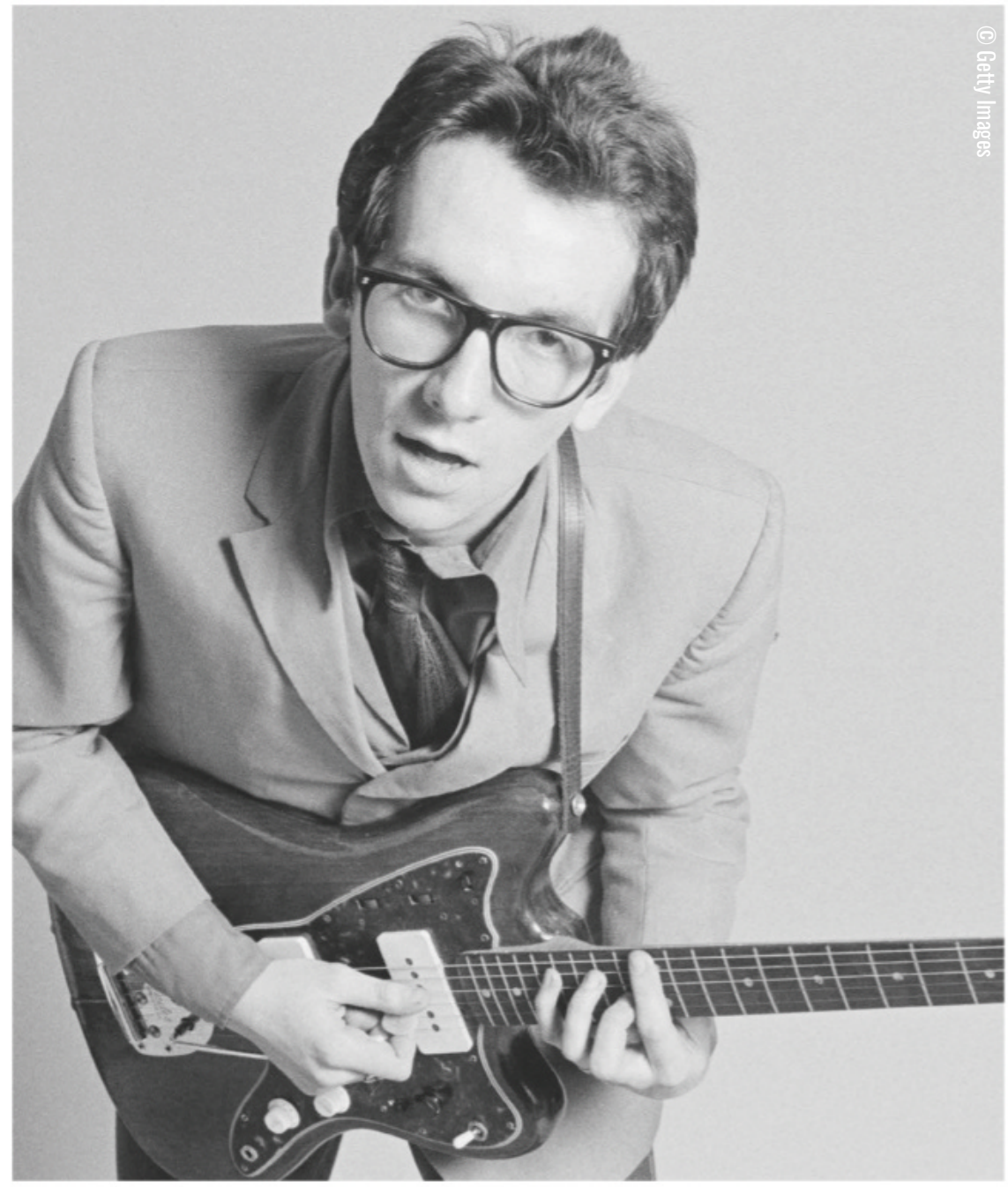
After surf-rock wiped out and the titans of the 70s lorded over rock, aspiring Jimmy Pages thought of offset guitars as old-fashioned relics from the old days. But fashion, as they say, is cyclical. Enter a skinny, bespectacled Englishman of Irish descent whose physical resemblance to Buddy Holly belied a musical style infused with the raw energy of punk and classic songwriting sensibilities. And the instrument on which he staked his claim to fame? You'll find it front and centre on his 1977 debut *My Aim Is True*: a Jazzmaster.

Although most of the lead work on the LP came courtesy of John McFee, that effortlessly cool album cover cast a long shadow. Costello, with that characteristic bent-knee pose, was elevated to iconic status along with the guitar that brought him there. It's ironic, given how he hadn't even heard of Jazzmasters when he found one in a London shop and traded his CBS Telecaster for a "Strat that someone had cut away a bit of".

Costello picked up another Jazzmaster, which was later refinished in 'greyburst' with his stage name emblazoned across the fretboard. It ended up sticking to him throughout his career, in studio recordings, gigs and music videos. Even as recently as 2018, Costello would sling it at his concerts, along with his original Jazzmaster, now refinished in red.

So it's fitting that, in 2008, to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Jazzmaster, Fender released an Elvis Costello signature based on his beloved instrument. "This is a brutal-sounding guitar," Costello said at the time of the guitar's launch. "And I've just always stuck with it; I always come back to it. I've done all sorts of different music, but whenever it's involved electric guitar, I don't think there's one record I've made on which the Jazzmaster doesn't feature somewhere." G

For even more must-hear offset players, head to *Guitar.com*.



LARKIN

THE GUITAR INTERVIEW

Megan and Rebecca Lovell might have got their start with traditional bluegrass music, but since 2010, the pair have been plugging in and making a dirty racket as Larkin Poe. We sat down with the sisters to find out how two millennial teenagers got sucked into roots music, the secrets behind their telepathic guitar relationship, their journey to the "dark side" with offset guitars, and why women need to find their own voice in the blues…

WORDS JOSH GARDNER **PHOTOGRAPHY** ROBBIE KLEIN

POE

© Getty Images

ABOVE Rebecca Lovell plays her Seafoam Green Nash JM at a benefit concert in LA in 2018

To watch Larkin Poe perform, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the Lovell sisters had been belting out sizzling roots-rock numbers since they were barely out of the crib, but the reality is that a decade ago, neither Rebecca nor her older sister Megan had picked up an electric instrument in anger.

"Both Megan and I grew up playing classical violin and piano," explains Rebecca, Larkin Poe's offset-wielding frontwoman. "We're the first generation of music-makers in our family. But starting so young was such a leg up for us, and has really changed the course of our lives."

The pair grew up in North Georgia, educated on a diet of classical music from their mother, and a mixture of classic rock and heavy metal courtesy of their dad, but it wasn't until the sisters, still barely into their teens, attended a local bluegrass festival with some family friends that they had their musical epiphany.

"We'd been playing in orchestras and quartets for many many years, but that was the first time we were able to experience music in a really joyful, improvisational and fiery way – watching these bluegrass quartets jam on stage," Megan recalls. "That was a bit of an 'ah-ha!' moment for us. The switch clicked and we were really inspired to drop our classical instruments and start playing roots American music instead."

BLUEGRASS IS GREENER

Throwing yourself head-first into bluegrass music wasn't exactly a normal thing for teenage girls to do in the early 2000s, even in a roots-music heartland such as Georgia – a fact that's not lost on the sisters.

"Dude, we were like the antithesis of cool!" Rebecca exclaims, laughing. "We were teenagers and we were so suckered in by bluegrass music… it's kinda strange that we were! But it was a very natural progression. I'm a very energetic person, so for me the mandolin and that banjo really made sense, because they're really aggressive, percussive instruments, but I think it took you a bit longer, Megan…"

"I did try to play mandolin, I tried to play banjo and guitar… but I guess me and fretted instruments just don't really quite work!" Megan agrees. "But when I saw a Dobro being played for the first time, I saw a connection between the Alison Krauss records we'd been listening to, and Jerry Douglas… and not really knowing what that instrument was or what that sound was. And making that connection of, 'Oh, that's the Dobro, that's what I've been hearing!', and just

immediately being so intrigued by it – it fit me so perfectly."

The pair teamed up with their older sibling Jessica to form the Lovell Sisters, who released three albums and toured heavily between 2005 and 2009, the girls being home-schooled on the road by their parents.

"I feel so fortunate that we were able to experience the Lovell Sisters and the touring that we did, because it was so unexpected, and it was so unintentional as well," Rebecca smiles. "We didn't necessarily feel like we were touring professionally, or laying the foundations for things that would come."

LARKIN ABOUT

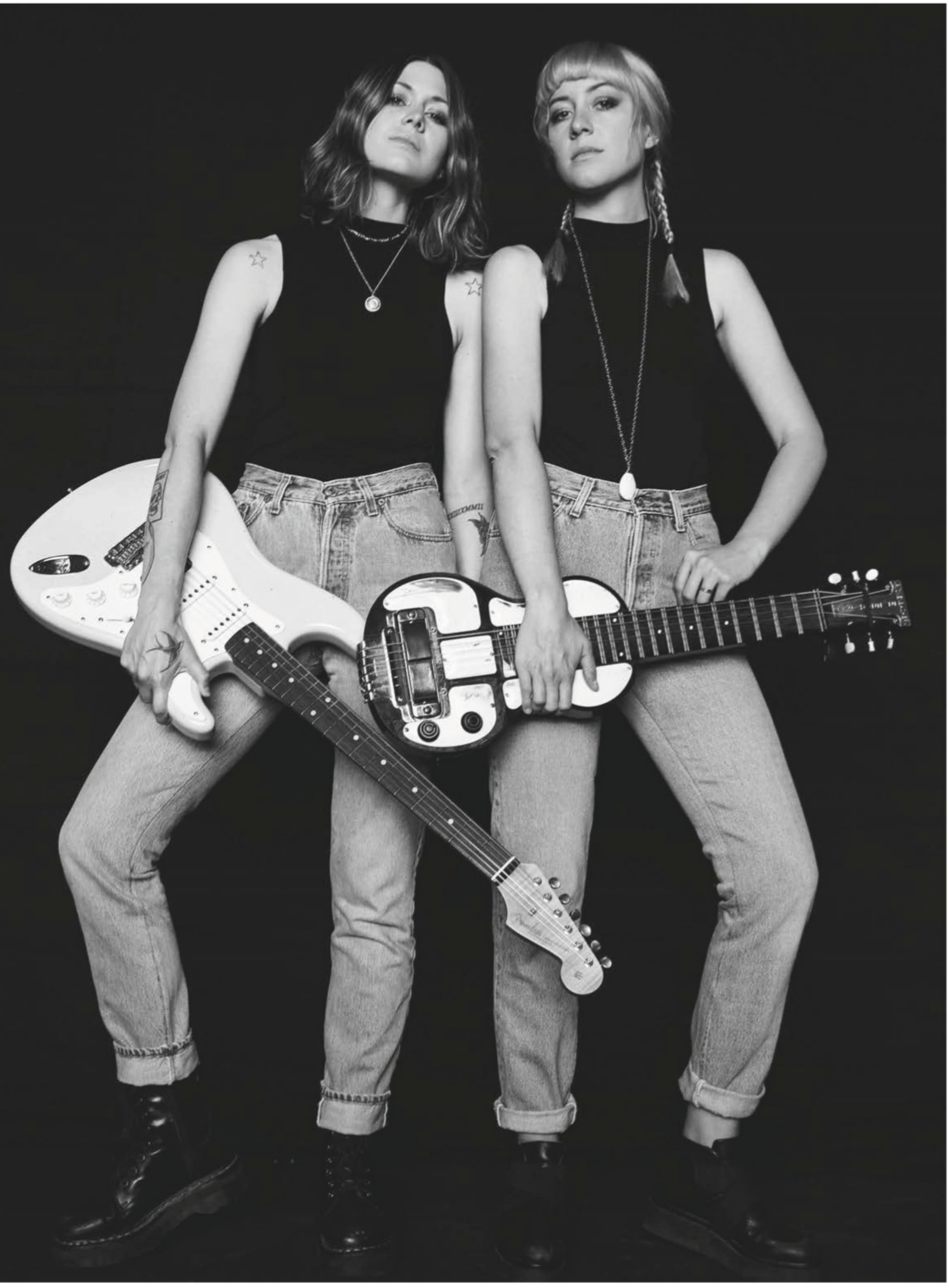
The Lovell Sisters came to an end when Jessica decided that she wanted to pursue education instead of a music career, but for her two teenage sisters, the desire to perform and make music full-time still burned bright. This time, however, they knew exactly what it would take. "When Larkin Poe started, that was us actually knowing what we were getting into," Megan explains.

And what they wanted to get into was rock 'n' roll…

"We had grown up listening to rock records, and a lot of those records came from our dad's collection, but we're never achieved those sounds ourselves," Megan continues. "Obviously, being an all-American string band – there was no drums, no amps, and no loud instruments! So starting Larkin Poe gave us the chance to explore and try things out, especially being young adults at that point, we're figuring out who we are as individuals, and experimenting with our music. And it was really challenging at first – I'll be honest with you, the sheer volume of a Fender amplifier was terrifying for me, so it took us a few years to get desensitised! Now we're tough old birds – we're so loud now!"

If the sisters were going to get loud, they had to leave their folk instruments behind and find something a little more suited to the task, and for Rebecca, there was only one electric guitar that really spoke to her – the Jazzmaster. "That's because of Elvis Costello, 100 per cent," she affirms. "We met him when we were young teens and we've developed a really great relationship with him over the years – he's been such a mentor to us. And just seeing him with that iconic red Jazzmaster with 'Elvis Costello' on the fretboard, when I decided that I did want to try playing electric, that was like my first step into the dark side of guitar, and I never looked back!"

Since forming Larkin Poe, Rebecca has often been seen with a beautiful Seafoam Green offset, with matching headstock, draped around her neck – but rather awkwardly, things aren't quite what they appear with that guitar. "Y'know what, it is not in fact a real Fender, but that's something as a Fender-endorsed artist we do not talk about!" Rebecca chuckles. "It's a Bill Nash JM Model, built down in Florida. I picked it up at a music store and just ripped the band-aid off and paid for it, which was a real deep cut to me as a teenager… but dude, it's such a sweet guitar!"



SLIDING DOORS

Megan's journey from Dobro maestro to lap-steel-slinger was a logical progression, and the 30-year-old took to her new instrument with aplomb – a 1950s Rickenbacker becoming a calling card as she dishes out lick after searing lick. "I was so lucky that I sort of happened into my Rickenbacker," Megan explains. "I had gone to get lessons in Chattanooga from a guy called Louie Wamp, who's a great Dobro player, and he suggested that I pick up this Rickenbacker he'd seen in Gruhn Guitars here in Nashville. He said: 'I really think that you'll like this lap-steel and it's a great price – I really think you should try it.'

"And so I trusted him and got it, and I've never played any other kind of lap-steel since! There's nothing like an old Rickenbacker lap-steel, so I've since bought like, three more – I'm very loyal to it! That's me as a person – I like finding something that works and sticking with it. I'm not much of a gear-head, once I find something, it's not going to change for years, including my strings!"

The pair's debut record as Larkin Poe was titled *Kin* and it instantly showed the familial connection at work with the pair's remarkable interplay with guitar, lap-steel and vocals.

"Ever since I can really remember, mine and Rebecca's connection has always been very solid," Megan explains. "We're less than two years apart, so we grew up with a little bit of that 'twin thing' where we seem to have a lot of communication that's not verbal."

"Yeah, I can shoot her a look and she knows exactly where I'm going, and vice versa," Rebecca continues. "It's all very effortless between the two of us, and that's really the reason why we decided to go into the studio and produce ourselves for our latest record, and to play everything on the record just the two of us. We wanted to have that lean, mean killing machine thing where the two of us can work really fast and dirty."

"WE WANTED TO PLAY EVERYTHING ON THE RECORD... TO HAVE THAT LEAN, MEAN KILLING MACHINE THING WHERE THE TWO OF US CAN WORK REALLY FAST AND DIRTY"

STING IN THE TAIL

That record, *Venom & Faith*, sees them extend their rootsy rock sound with electronic sounds and hip-hop beats to complement their guitars and vocals. In many ways, it's the culmination of a process that took the sisters all the way back to their roots, so they could branch out again.

"A couple of years ago, Megan and I had this idea to make this YouTube series called *Tip O' The Hat*, where we just sit in our bedrooms and do stripped-back covers. People really loved those," Rebecca explains. "There was something about that highlighting of the sister connection that people really responded to, and we would just get comment after comment on these videos, 'Oh please, make a record like this, we love seeing the two of you so stripped back!' And so, listening to our fans and the support under those videos, it felt like the right step to make."

That step was *Peach* – an album of classic American roots staples that brought Megan and Rebecca as close as they'd come to their Lovell Sisters sound since forming Larkin Poe. "*Peach* was such a mile-marker for us," Rebecca says. "It was a real step-out point in terms of having the courage to make that record. We made it literally in a long weekend. We went into the studio with Roger Alan Nichols [engineer] and just knocked it out, then put it out to the universe. And it was so loved and we got so much positive feedback, we knew we wanted to take a similar-ish tack with *Venom & Faith* – obviously self-producing again, working with Roger again, and playing everything. But instead of paying such a direct homage to the past with so many covers, we wanted to introduce more originals into the mix.

"I think what people hear with *Venom & Faith* is Megan and I stretching out into our creative imagination – the land of anything possible! Trying to create original moments with our unique spin, but also wanting to pay homage to the roots American music tradition."

LEFT From debut record *Kin* in 2014 to fourth long-player *Venom & Faith*, electric guitar and lap-steel have been the bedrock of Larkin Poe's sound

© Getty Images

“THE VULNERABILITY THAT WE SHARE WITH PEOPLE IN PROMOTING OUR RELATIONSHIP AS SISTERS, IT’S A LITTLE DYSFUNCTIONAL, BUT ALSO REALLY POWERFUL”

ABOVE The pair performing at the Third Annual Love Rocks NYC Benefit Concert earlier this year, with Rebecca sporting one of the Strats she’s favoured of late

ROOTS MANOEUVRES

Despite only having four studio albums, Larkin Poe’s records are stylistically varied – “Our fans have been so supportive with all the genre-dabbling we’ve done over the years!” Megan jokes – but no matter what influences they’re pulling in, the Georgia duo’s music always seems to have a through-line of Americana.

“I would say you can lay that mostly at the feet of Megan Lovell!” Rebecca enthuses. “The way that she plays that slide, there’s so much history in the way she plays – it’s sort of innate in the way she constructs riffs and creates that bluesy feel. And then I’m inspired to sing and play differently by the way she plays the slide. So that’s a major touchstone for the Southern-ness of our records, the last two especially.”

“I think one of my favourite moments on the album would be *Good And Gone*,” Megan chimes in. “Because that’s one of the moments where we really highlight the connection between Rebecca’s vocal and my lap-steel playing. I consider my lap-steel to be more of my voice than my actual voice! It’s my way of singing with Rebecca. There’s something so very special about singing through my lap-steel with her voice.”

It’s nearly impossible to talk about roots music without getting into the blues – a genre that often ties itself in knots worrying about what’s ‘authentic’ and what isn’t, but Rebecca is quick to explain that the burden of history doesn’t have to be a straitjacket.

“The blues is such a powerful genre that means so much to so many people, that we want to do our best to do something fresh with it. To not just spit out the past like some sort of a time capsule – especially as we’re women making blues music.

“More and more, we’re seeing women come in and take the blues and run with it, and I love that, but we of course want to give it a unique spin, and just because of the fact of our DNA, we can’t help but! So it’s a very exciting time to be coming back to roots and making something fresh with it.”

SISTER ACT

Popular music has seen many siblings share the stage over the decades, and while the innate chemistry of people who know each other so well is often an advantage, there have been a few high-profile examples in which sibling rivalry has had combustible results both on and off stage. It’s something that, as the only two members of the band, Megan and Rebecca are very aware of…

“Being sisters is the fundamental thing of our band, and it’s the major axis that we rotate off. Megan and I grew up being best friends since we were babies!” Rebecca explains. “We were inseparable, so there is that deep connection there, a such a shared history. But there are deeper pitfalls that I think siblings in bands have to overcome.

“Band politics is a thing that can tear people apart, and you look at a band like Fleetwood Mac and just think, ‘Oh my god, what a frickin’ drama! I would never do that!’ But then you look at the Gallaghers or Heart, The Black Crowes… Siblings – we know the buttons to push with one another, and it takes great control to not push those buttons!

“I think there’s only been a few times where we’ve gone on stage truly pissed at one another! I can think of maybe one time, and even then it was just like, superficial pissed-off-edness… but you can feel it! If we’re upset with each other, it’s really hard to mask that from a crowd. So it’s almost like a higher-stakes game – the vulnerability that we share with people in promoting our relationship as sisters, it’s a little dysfunctional, but also really powerful.”

“I think we absolutely keep each other honest,” Megan concludes. “We can sniff each others’ BS out instantly, and we’re not going to let each other get away with it!” G

Larkin Poe’s *Venom & Faith* is out now on Tricki-Woo Records

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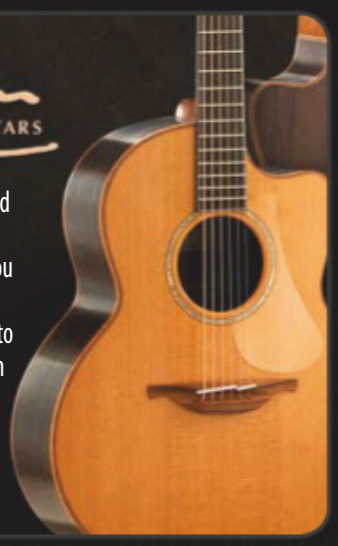

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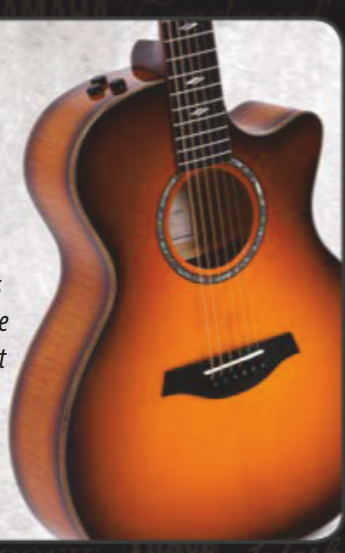

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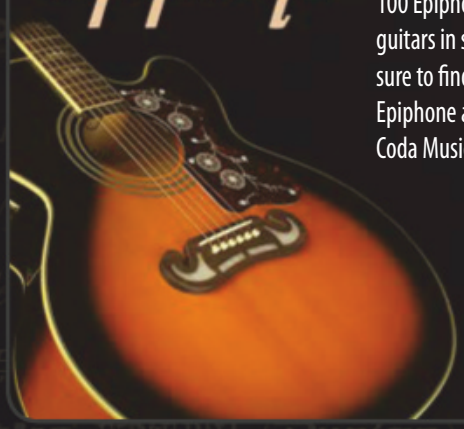

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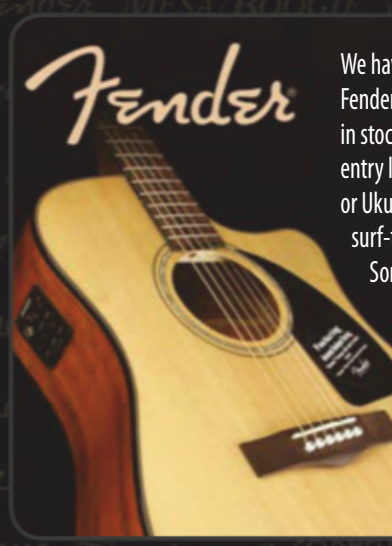

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Dennis Fano with a Serus T in Novo's Nashville workshop

DENNIS FANO OF NOVO GUITARS

BETWEEN THE LINES

INTERVIEW CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Whether they've had Fano, Novo or Rivolta on the headstock, Dennis Fano's guitars have long betrayed a love-affair with offset-body designs. We spoke to the Nashville-based luthier to find out why…

Although he's responsible for some of the coolest electric-guitar designs on the planet, Dennis Fano started out playing bass, and his first experience of an offset-body Fender was thanks to a love of British rock behemoths Led Zeppelin.

"The first offset that I ever encountered was actually my '66 Jazz Bass," the luthier remembers. "I was – and still am – a big Zeppelin fan. One of the first bands that I was in was a Zep cover band so, naturally, I had to have a Jazz Bass."

By the mid 1990s, Dennis was working as a tech in Matt Umanov Guitars in New York. "The first offset guitar that I ever worked on was probably a 60s Jaguar or Jazzmaster, when I was doing repair work at Matt Umanov Guitars in Greenwich Village," he recalls. "Offset bodies have always appealed to me more than traditional shapes. They're sleek and sexy, but the ergonomics of the offset are the real draw. Seated or standing, offsets balance better than traditional designs."

From the moment Dennis started working on his own electric-guitar designs, offsets were hugely influential.

"My first original design, the Fano Satellite, had a single-cut offset body," he recalls. "I started building those back in '95. The early pre-Alt de Facto Fano designs were all offsets. Six of the nine Alt de Facto designs were offsets. Every guitar that we're currently building at Novo is an offset. All of the models that I've designed for Rivolta Guitars are offsets. In fact, I've got a trio of new Novo models and a couple for Rivolta on the drawing board and yep, they're all offsets! [laughs]"

Although offset guitars have traditionally been favoured by experimentalists, we wonder if the way in which they've been embraced by the Instagram generation means they're almost in danger of becoming too mainstream. Could the coolest guitars on the block soon become so ubiquitous that they lose their outsider appeal? "The offset is having its moment in the sun," Dennis acknowledges. "I think the introduction of the Mastery Bridge and Vibrato has had a lot to do with that. It's *that* good, so a lot of builders are taking a traditional approach with their offset builds. I've always viewed the [Novo] Serus design as a platform or a jumping-off point. Its large, offset body actually adapts really well to a wide variety of configurations and playing styles. We offer a Serus with Mastery hardware, but one of our most popular models has a Tele bridge and a P-90 pickup in the neck position."

Anyone who follows Novo (@novoguitars) on Instagram will have seen how the Serus body shape is a flexible platform for customisation. We wonder if using a wrapover or tune-o-matic bridge with a bolt-on neck requires a different neck angle to a Mastery unit?

"We machine our neck pockets at a slight angle when we use those taller bridges," says Dennis. "In fact, we use the same neck angle for all three of them. That raises the Mastery slightly higher than you'll see on most other offsets, but the increased break angle helps to tame sympathetic overtones."

For more on Novo Guitars, visit coda-music.com and novoguitars.com

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AT HOME WITH BRIAN RAY

As Paul McCartney's guitarist, musical director for Etta James, songwriter for Smokey Robinson, solo artist, producer and plenty more besides, Brian Ray has a glittering CV. We visit his home in Santa Monica to check out some instruments with a similar level of lustre…

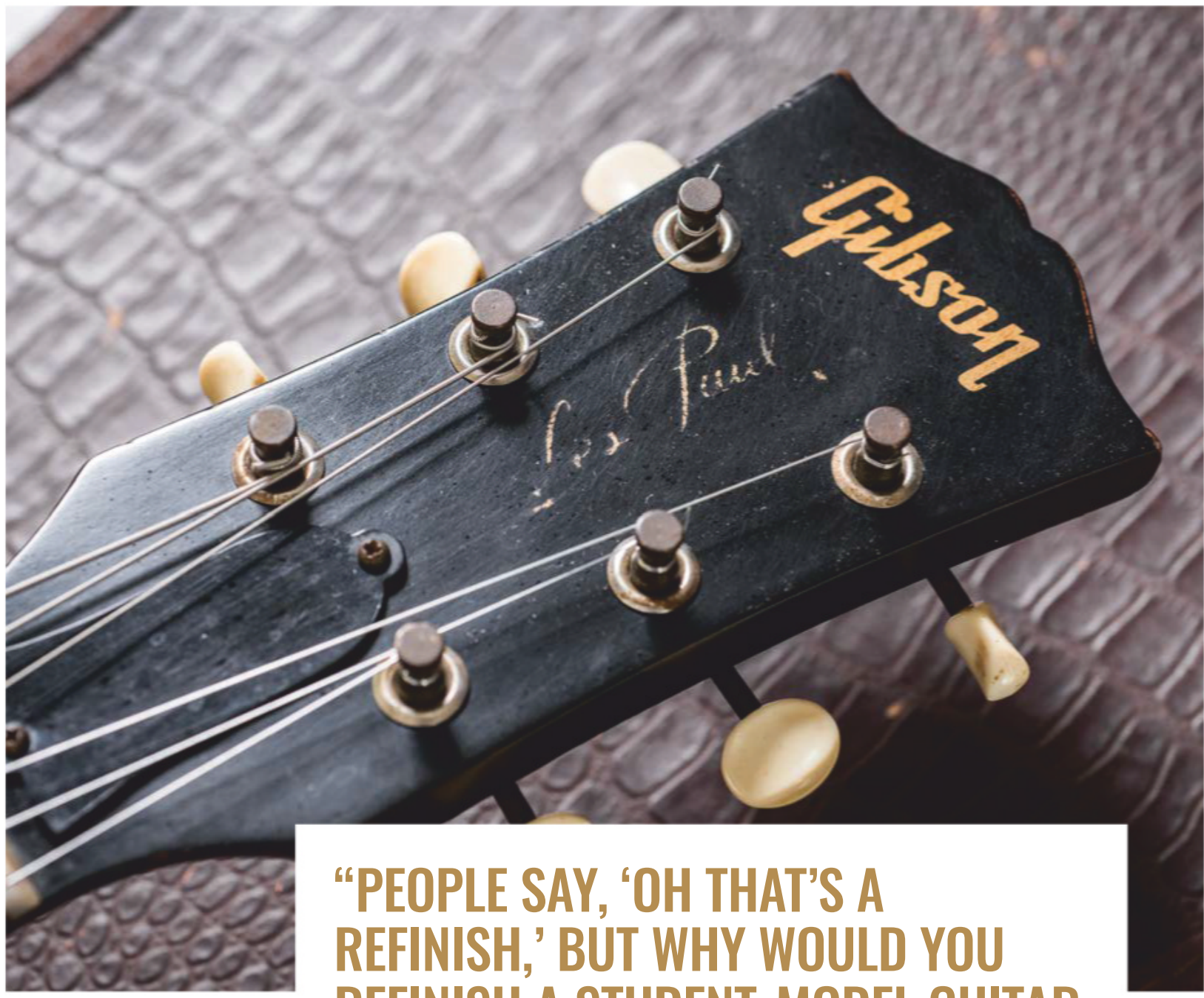
WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE | **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

With the noise of the Winter NAMM Show still ringing in our ears, we head 40 or so miles northwest from Orange County up to Santa Monica. Although it's been overcast all morning, there are signs that the California sunshine is beginning to break through the clouds as we arrive at the home of a guitarist whose guitar collection is as enviable as his regular gig.

Although he's been a fixture of the Paul McCartney band since 2002 – switching between guitar and bass duties as the set demands – there's much more to Brian Ray's career than simply travelling the world and playing some of the greatest songs ever written to enormous audiences.

Back in the early 1970s, an encounter with Etta James would pave the way for 14 years as the R&B icon's guitarist and musical director. Ray's other collaborations have included artists as diverse as Johnny Hallyday and Smokey Robinson, alongside a host of star session appearances, songwriting and production credits. He's also released two solo albums and an LP with his band The Bayonets.

17,000 Instagram followers (@brianrayguitar) can attest to the fact that Brian is a bona-fide guitar addict. Although his collection includes a 1959 Les



"PEOPLE SAY, 'OH THAT'S A REFINISH,' BUT WHY WOULD YOU REFINISH A STUDENT-MODEL GUITAR IN THE FIRST PLACE? WHY DO YOU GO TO ALL THAT TROUBLE?"

Paul Standard and the 1957 Goldtop that he "rode hard and put away wet" at every show with Etta James – not to mention an incredible 1953 Blackguard Telecaster – we're here today see some of the rarer instruments in his arsenal.

Brian's Santa Monica home is something of an architectural triumph, with a large, elevated living space affording views of the ocean and the tall palm trees that line the pavements in this neighborhood. As we sit down to talk guitar, the affable guitarist is clearly excited about his new signature Gibson Custom Shop SG Junior, unveiled at the NAMM Show in Anaheim just a couple of days earlier.

The model features an Ebony Block Vibrola tailpiece and a unique convertible bridge that allows you to quickly bypass the tailpiece and install a wrapover in not much more time than it takes to change a set of strings. There's also a clever noise-reduction circuit, accessible via a push-push tone control.

This is all somewhat fitting, as it was an SG Junior – or more correctly, a 1962 Les Paul Junior – that got us here in the first place. In ultra-rare factory sunburst, this beautiful instrument is possibly one of a kind. Brian snapped the guitar up the moment it appeared on the Instagram feed of UK vintage dealer ATB Guitars at the tail end of 2018. Ray plays the '62 while our portrait shoot takes place and we're struck by its powerful acoustic voice. "It's just a tremendous guitar," he grins. "A stunner. Acoustically, it sounds terrific."

A coating of tar from its previous life in a smoky environment has been cleaned up by Joel Wilkens of JW Guitar Restoration since we last saw the instrument back in the UK. After doing some sleuth work, Brian is in no doubt as to the finish's originality, which resembles the sunburst you might find on a Melody Maker from the same era.

"All the solder is factory," he reveals. "People say: 'Oh that's a refinish,' but why would you refinish a student-model guitar in the first place? Why do you go to all that trouble? How do you get the electronics out to refinish it without unsoldering it? It just doesn't make sense."

THIS SPREAD
This 1962 Gibson Les Paul/SG Junior in factory sunburst is likely to be one of a kind. Aside from one screw on the control cavity plate, a later bridge and that quirky sticker, it's all-original

THIS PAGE
"This is a very clean Pelham Blue SG Junior, a real nice one," says Brian. "A '65, chunky neck, loud as hell. Rambunctious little thing! I could picture [Pelham Blue] on a GTO, couldn't you? Look how the neck is more green than the body, just from the hand acids. Somebody was having fun way up high! But it's a sweet, sweet thing"

SINGLES CLUB

The unique sunburst guitar is joined here by a wonderful '65 SG Junior in Pelham Blue and a '58 TV Junior that made an appearance on US television show *Happy Days*. There's clearly something about single-pickup guitars that Brian likes an awful lot.

"I find that for me, there is no better, cleaner, simpler design in electric guitar than a single-pickup guitar with the pickup in the bridge position," says Brian. "In the case of Gibsons, without the neck pickup, you have a much longer neck-to-body contact. That gives the resonance through the neck, from the fingerboard down into the body, a lot more play.

"The other issue is that, as we all know, electric-guitar sound is produced by a magnetic pickup. When you have a pickup in the neck position and sometimes a pickup in the middle, and a pickup in the back position at the bridge, now you've got three magnets slowing down or pulling on each one of those strings trying to vibrate. For me, it's just better to have a single pickup, in a lot of cases.

"I've played a lot of TV Juniors and TV Specials, and Les Paul Specials and Juniors of any colour, and I've never played a bad Junior. But I've played plenty of not-the-best-sounding Les Paul Specials, with the pickup in the neck position. Of course, they changed how close to the neck that pickup rout was, over the years. They learned a little bit later on – they put the pickup farther away from the end of the fingerboard, which was an improvement."

And it's not just about physics. Brian agrees that it's possible to get an extraordinary amount of range from

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1967 Gibson ES-330L Burgundy

1934 Gibson Super 400

1957 Fender Stratocaster Mary Kaye
1959 Fender Stratocaster maple neck
1961 Fender Stratocaster Blonde
1962 Fender Stratocaster Fiesta Red
1963 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White
1969 Fender Stratocaster S/B
1973 Fender Stratocaster LPB
1982 Fender Stratocaster AVRI

1952 Fender Telecaster ex-Lenny Kravitz
1953 Fender Telecaster
1956 Fender Telecaster
1958 Fender Telecaster Custom Prototype CATALOGUE guitar!
1967 Fender Custom Telecaster Candy Apple Red
1968 Fender Telecaster Thinline
1969 Fender Telecaster Sonic Blue

1959 Fender Jazzmaster Blonde
1963 Fender Jaguar Blonde Gold
1966 Fender Jaguar Olympic White

1952 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1955 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1968 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1958 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1974 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1955 Gibson Les Paul Junior
1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior 3/4
1960 Gibson Les Paul TV Junior
1956 Gibson Les Paul TV Special
1962 Gibson Les Paul SG STD Ebony Block
1963 Gibson Les Paul SG STD
1963 Gibson Korina Flying V White

1966 Fender Jazz Bass Sonic Blue MINT
1953 Fender Precision Bass
1980 Musicman Bass MINT!

1963 Gretsch Tennessean
1972 Dick Knight Custom Twin Neck ex Jon Camp Renaissance
1967 Rickenbacker 360/12 Gold Parts

1964 Epiphone FT110 Frontier
1968 Martin 00-18C

2005 PRS Employees Model Santana 2
2016 PRS DGT Private Stock
2015 Gibson True Historic Ace Frehley
2016 Gibson True Historic R9 Tom Murphy

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1957 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster

1952 Fender Telecaster Blackguard

1956 Gibson Les Paul Standard MINT

1969 Gibson Flying V

1964 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White

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TV STAR

What's even cooler than your average '58 TV Junior? One that's been on TV, of course…
"This came through a friend of mine named Ricky, who's been a guitar trader for many years," says Brian. "He got it from Willie Basse, who's no longer with us, unfortunately. Willie got it from the props department down at Paramount in Los Angeles. He simply went to the props department and asked if they had any guitars in stock, and there was a rack of guitars they've used for various movies and TV shows. Why other people haven't thought of this, or gotten this guitar previously, I've no idea. But it was played by Richie Cunningham in his band on the show *Happy Days*."

“YOU CAN PLAY WITH A LOT OF DYNAMICS, YOU DON’T ALWAYS NEED TO BE BITING HARD WITH YOUR RIGHT HAND. ALL THE GREAT BLUES PLAYERS WILL SHOW YOU THAT”

a single-pickup guitar by simply varying your picking-hand attack and position, and alternating between pick and fingers: “You can play with a lot of dynamics, you don’t always need to be biting hard with your right hand. All the great blues players will show you that. The dynamics in the right and left hand are key to an emotional performance.”

HAPPY SHOPPER

Brian’s love affair with guitars and guitar collecting began early on and when it came to guitar stores, he was spoilt for choice in Southern California in the late 1960s. “I think the seed was planted in me when I was first getting infatuated with the guitar as an instrument, as a piece of art,” he recalls. “I used to go down to the music store when I was 12 years old, on the number nine bus, and pay a quarter for that bus ride.

“I’d go down there at 10 in the morning, go and get some French fries and Coca-Cola and do a tour of all the guitar shops in Santa Monica. There was Bay Music, Cunningham Music… eventually, I would end up at the big Ace Music on Santa Monica Boulevard and spend the better part of the day there, just fawning over these guitars and admiring them. They were stacked up to the ceilings! You’d have these older guitar players – I was 12, so everyone was older! – coming in there and playing these great guitars. They had a great combination of vintage and rare guitars and new guitars, and the place was chock-full of ’em. And I was infatuated. So for me, collecting came right along with learning how to play the guitar.

“My first vintage guitar was an early 60s Fender Telecaster, then soon after that I got a 1968 Goldtop Les Paul. Not too long after that, I traded that and got a 1957 Goldtop Les Paul that maybe you’ve seen me play with Etta James and Paul McCartney. But I began collecting as soon as I began playing.”

THE BASSMAN COMETH

In 2002, when his drummer friend Abe Laboriel Jr mentioned that Paul McCartney was looking for a guitarist who could also play bass for his live band, Ray ended up getting the gig full-time following a

ABOVE RIGHT “I think it’s a ’71,” says Brian of this super-rare Lilac Lavender Tele. “Sometimes for school fairs or NAMM shows, they would do one-off colours. They did many different colours. I like weird stuff and rare stuff… the more rare, the better!”

low-key audition in front of 80,000 people at the Super Bowl.

We wonder what kind of mindset shift is required to swap and change between bass and guitar roles during a live performance?

"It was certainly strange at first," he admits. "I'm a guitar player who plays a bit of bass in Paul McCartney's band, rather than a bass player who plays a bit of guitar. I've played lead guitar and led bands for Etta James and Rita Coolidge and everyone I've worked with as a guitar player. Now of course, since Paul has given me this amazing opportunity to play his wonderful, colourful bass parts live on stage – and on record as well, sometimes – I've now been called to come and do records for people as a bass player. So I'm super, super grateful for that.

"And yes, it is a bit of a transition. It was much more striking of a transition and a contrast when I first started. Now it's just part of what I do every single

THIS SPREAD This stunning 1964 Gibson Firebird V in Cardinal Red is "a mint guitar in nearly unsold condition, that came out of a marvellous collection back East," Brian reveals. Note the way in which the colour was shot right up to the edge of the fingerboard binding

ABOVE
Brian picked this 1964 Höfner Club bass up about a decade ago from songwriting partner Oliver Lieber. "It's so great," he says. "It weighs about four pounds at the most!"

“PAUL’S BEEN REALLY GENEROUS AND FAIRLY LIBERAL WITH ALL OF US FOR PLAYING OUR PARTS. THAT SAID, WE ALL COME TO THIS JOB WITH A GREAT DEAL OF REVERENCE”

THIS PAGE
You don’t see a custom-colour Fender Electric XII too often, but Brian shows us a pair from 1965 – one in Firemist Gold, one in black, both with matching headstocks. “The gold one I got on Reverb.com some time ago and I’ve just sold it,” he admits. “The black one with the black headstock is so much more rare and to be honest with you, at this point, I don’t need two custom-colour Fender XIIs. A lot of people are just bananas about custom-colour XIIs... I just need the one and obviously, I chose the rarest of the rare ones”

night. I put on a bass, it’s a little lower on my body, it’s got great big strings, there’s only four of ’em and I fulfil a different role in playing under and supporting the band.”

Although what he does every single night is perform songs that are woven into the fabric of popular consciousness, there’s still room to manoeuvre: “For the most part, Paul’s been really generous and fairly liberal with all of us for playing our parts. That said, we all come to this job with a great deal of reverence and respect for the parts that you and I and everyone else on the Earth has grown up loving. These parts, these hooks that are in our bloodstream – the funny thing about all these parts and hooks is that they may have only happened one time, but that was the time they recorded the song that we’ve each heard a million times.

“So, while they are intrinsic to these songs and they are invaluable to the listener, they are also real people

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ADVENTURES IN STEREO

This mid-60s Teisco Spectrum 5 has recently seen studio action…

"I just recorded a solo with it on my new B-side. It sounds terrific," says Brian. "I went for the full bad garage sound! It's a '66 or '67. It has split pickups and you can change some of those funny little coloured toggles into a 'stereo' position. There's two output jacks; if you go to two separate amps you get the E, A and D strings going through one amp and the G, B and high E going through another. I used these inversions that'd make the sound jump from one amp to another during the solo. It's hilarious – right in the middle of this very garage-y, weird solo comes these weird inversions and the sound bounces back and forth. It's a B-side for my upcoming single on Wicked Cool records, Steven Van Zandt's label."

playing music in those moments back whenever Paul recorded them. So he allows us a lot of room, and if we go too far, he'll say: 'Brian, you might wanna take a listen to the record again, I'm not sure that's the intro,' or something like that and you're like, 'Oh!' [laughs] And then you simply go and put on your headphones, you listen, you come back and do it the way he recorded it. But that's happened so rarely. Literally, three times since I've been in the band has he said: 'I'm not sure that's how that goes.'

Ultimately, we imagine there's a great deal of pleasure to be derived from simply standing on stage and replicating some of the most loved guitar and bass parts in pop history. If it ain't broke…

"Yeah, you don't wanna add to 'em, or you become the woman who thought she might restore that fresco in that chapel and modernise it a little bit. And then it becomes entirely different and people make memes of it forever. So you don't wanna do that!"

All things considered, it's perhaps not a great surprise to see a 1964 Höfner bass on Brian's wall – albeit a Club model rather than a 500/1. It's the final instrument that we shoot this afternoon, and Brian's reason for owning it perhaps reflects why he's been a first-call player for so many years. As much as he's a passionate collector with a love for rare instruments, music is first and foremost.

"I really wanted a Höfner bass for recording," he explains. "It's a valuable tool, just as having a five-string bass is a valuable tool. Although I'll never play the five-string that often, I want to have it if someone says: 'Hey, I need a low B.' It's just a matter of having the tools in your tool belt, to be of service to people that ask you to come in and play, or that hire you to play on their records." G

Visit brianray.com to find out more about Brian's upcoming single on Wicked Cool records, *Pirate Radio*

ABOVE Brian has recently collaborated with Smokey Robinson. The pair first worked together in the 1980s

© Getty Images

DICK DALE
1937-2019

We were saddened to hear that Dick Dale, the 'king of the surf guitar', passed away on 16 March at the age of 81. Perhaps best known for *Misirlou*, the song featured on the soundtrack of Quentin Tarantino's acclaimed *Pulp Fiction* in 1994, Dale was a trailblazer in the surf-guitar genre and a Fender signature artist.

Born Richard Anthony Monsour on 4 May 1937 in Boston, Massachusetts, Dale was known for his use of Middle Eastern scales and reverb, not to mention the sheer speed and energy of his playing, which would prove to be a huge influence on later generations of guitarists.

The left-handed star, who played Stratocasters strung 'upside down' with the heavy strings on the bottom, also worked closely with Leo Fender on amplifier designs. His uniquely aggressive style tested Fender's amp circuits and speakers to their limits – and the Dual Showman was the fearsome result of Dick and Leo's experiments.

Though he had been suffering from health issues for many years, Dale continued to release albums, and performed live right up to the end of his life. He was due to take to the stage again in May.

When asked why he wouldn't retire, Dale told *California Rocker*: "Well, there are two reasons I don't retire: playing music keeps me alive, and my music helps others."

Our thoughts are with his friends and family – the guitar community has lost a true pioneer. G

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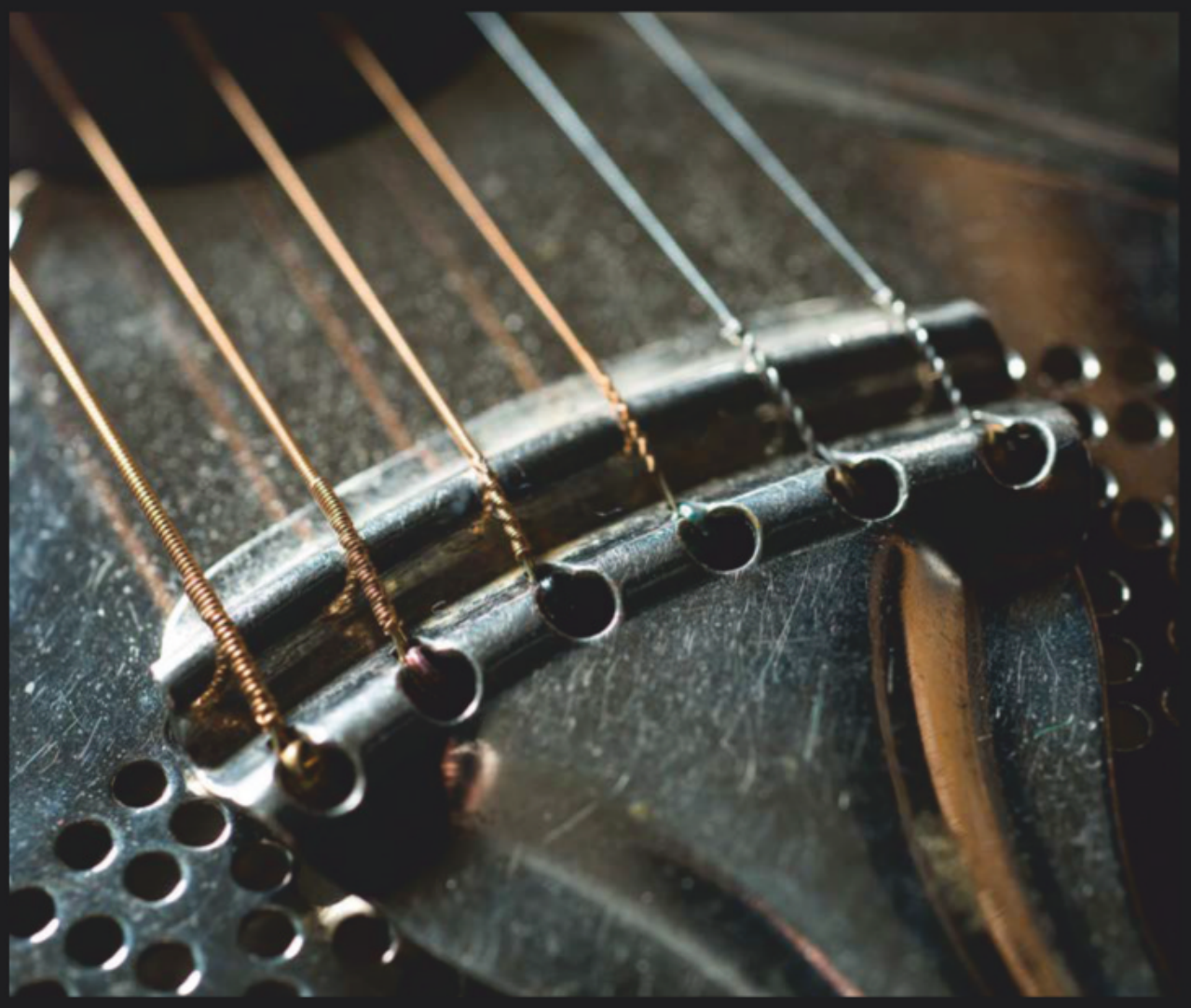

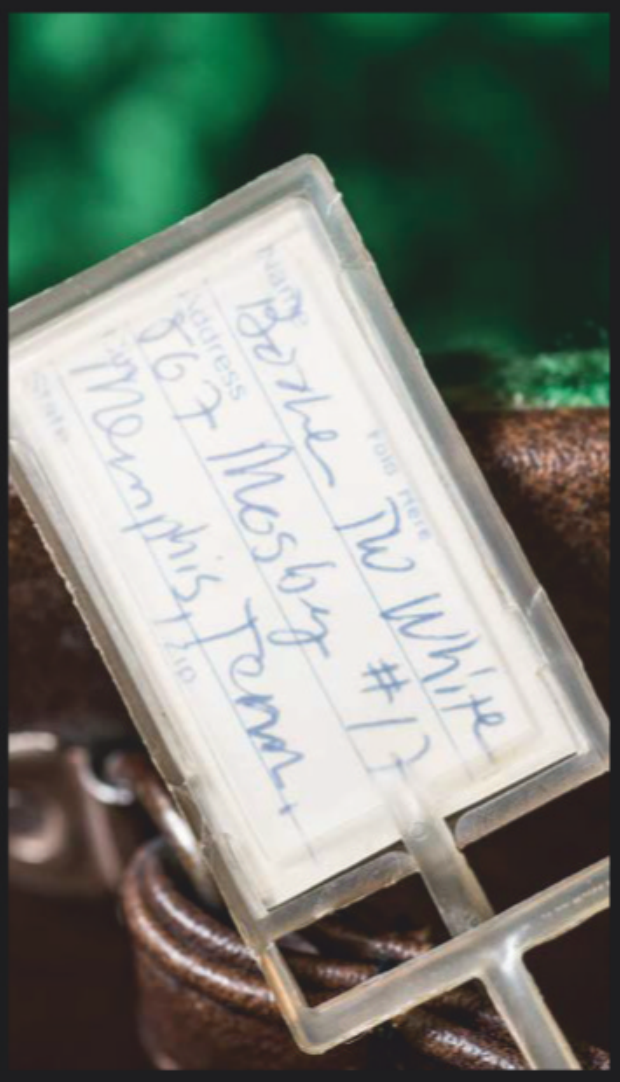
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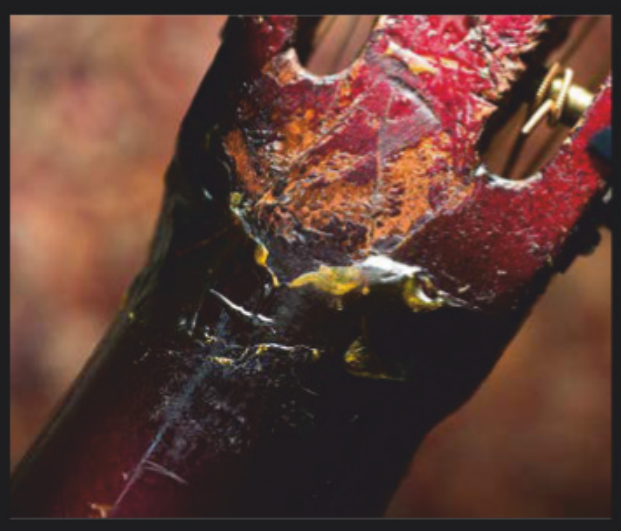

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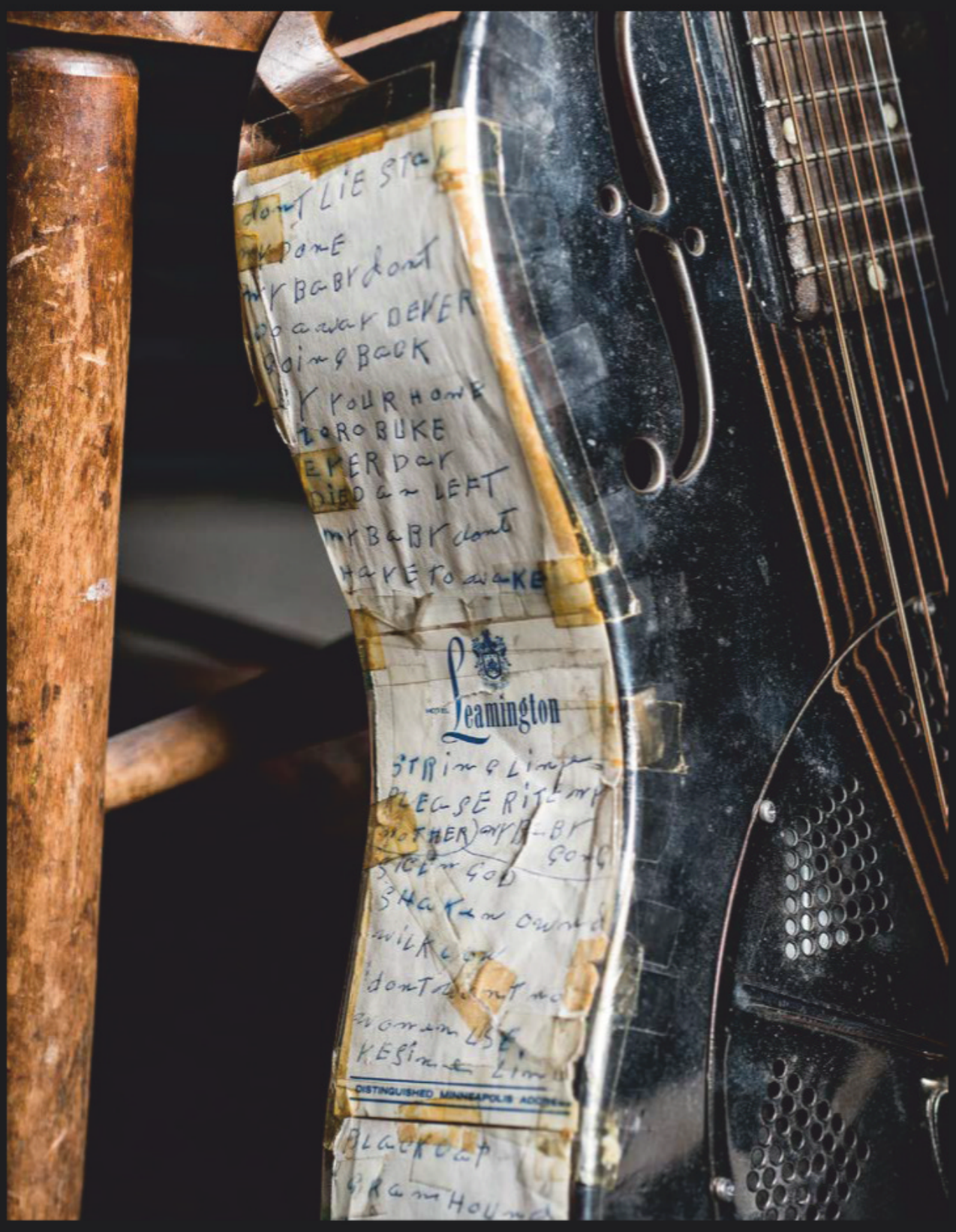

Leamington

There are guitars with vintage mojo, and there are guitars with vintage mojo. And then there's 'Hard Rock', the 1933 National Duolian owned and used by bluesman Booker T Washington 'Bukka' White for over 30 years. Described as a "holy relic" by White's younger cousin BB King, the resonator bears the battle scars of decades of exhuberant live performances, including a crude headstock repair. There's also that setlist: penned in a spidery hand on hotel notepaper and still clinging to the guitar by the grace of yellowed sticky tape.

Hard Rock recently sold at auction for £93,000 including fees via our friends at Gardiner Houlgate in Corsham, Wiltshire. Before the sale, we were lucky enough to spend some time with the instrument which, for all its history, is still surprisingly player-friendly. It also sounds extraordinary.

Visit youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to hear this storied guitar in action and find out more. The next Gardiner Houlgate guitar auction takes place on 12 June – head to guitar-auctions.co.uk for details. G

1966-67 CATALOG

THE LIFE AQUATIC

A close encounter with an original Ocean Turquoise Fender offset is a rare event indeed, and this ’66 Jazzmaster even has case candy. We take a deep dive…

WORDS HUW PRICE **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

ABOVE This Jazzmaster sports a retrofitted Mustang bridge

OPPOSITE TOP Chips in the finish reveal a more vibrant, bluish hue beneath

OPPOSITE BOTTOM Even the plastics have stood the test of time and the glare of light

Identifying custom colours on vintage Fenders isn't always as straightforward as you might think. This is especially true when the colour coats were overspayed with clear nitro, which would subsequently darken with exposure to sunlight. It doesn't take much for Olympic White to look blonde, or Lake Placid Blue to turn green. But when a finish is clearly original and you have the funds, it sometimes makes sense to buy the guitar and figure it out later…

That's more or less what happened with this 1966 Jazzmaster. It was sold to ATB Guitars in Cheltenham, England as a Sherwood Green example. On arrival, closer examination reveals the finish to be the equally rare and arguably more attractive Ocean Turquoise.

Online pictures can be misleading when it comes to colour, so it's always best to examine original guitars in person. But when they are so rare, how many of us will ever get the chance?

This is our first encounter with a vintage Ocean Turquoise Fender, but a friend has an old Sherwood Green Strat and it looks very different. Sherwood Green has a mossy darkness and can look rather grubby with age.

There is an unmistakable hint of green to this Jazzmaster's hue, but where the finish is chipped, we can make out a more vivid blue layer. Yellow stain is also visible under a layer of Fullerplast, as is an off-white base coat. Like all of Fender's original metallic finishes – with the exception of Candy Apple Red – the metallic particles were suspended within the paint, so spraying was a one-step process.

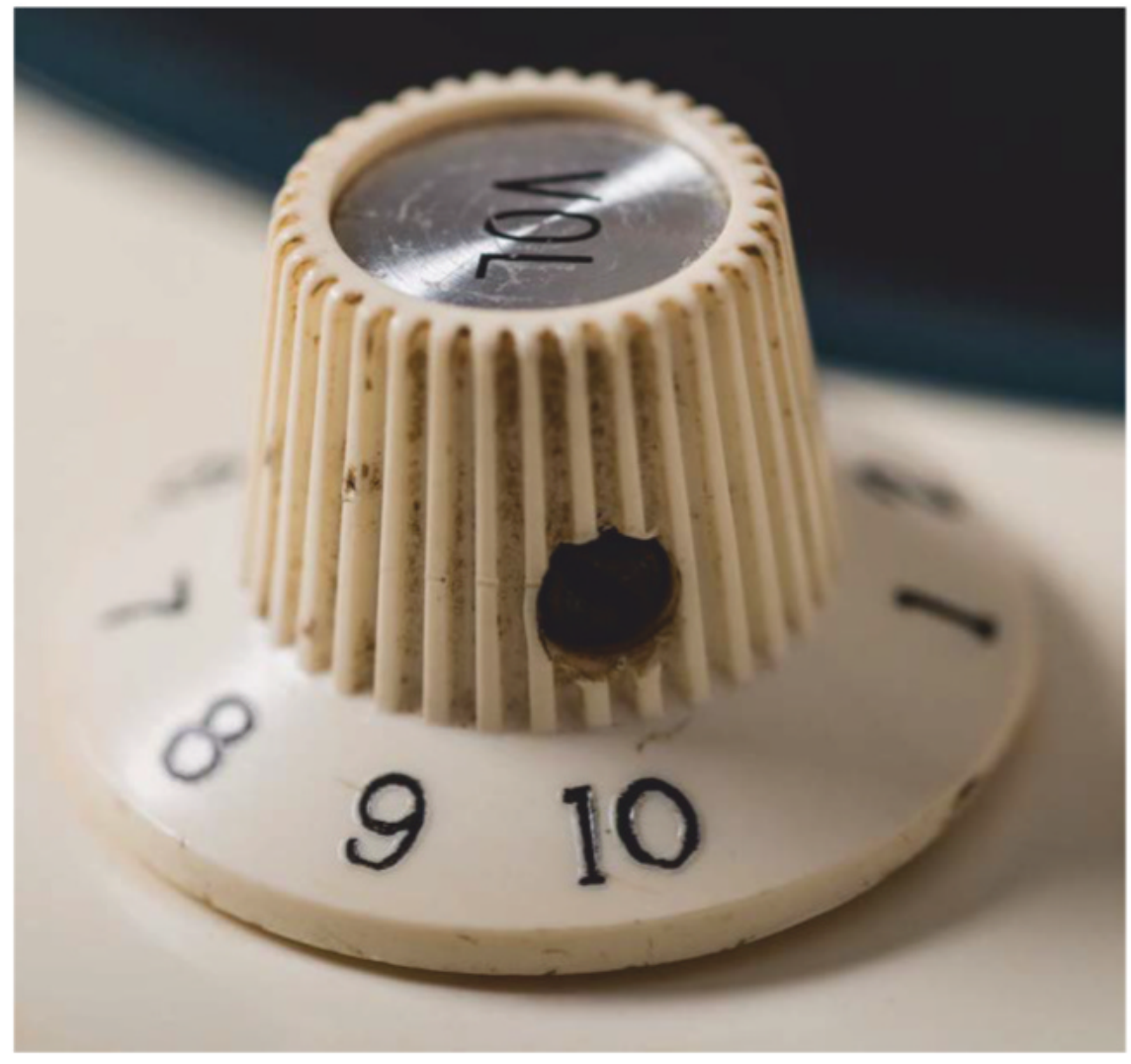
Mixing blue and yellow produces green – hence the green tint from the yellowed nitrocellulose lacquer top coats. It's too dark to be Ice Blue, too light to be Lake Placid, and too blue to be Teal Green – so we're convinced this is Ocean Turquoise. Even so, we've seen vintage Lake Placid Blue finishes with nitro top coats that have aged to be almost indistinguishable from this. In those instances, evidence of the original hue can usually be found beneath plastics or hardware.

Fender offered Ocean Turquoise from 1965 to 1971, but it was originally created by Dupont for Ford, and it was first seen as Twilight Turquoise Metallic on 1964 Mustangs. It's actually an acrylic, but even so, there's checking all over the body in a particularly intricate and attractive pattern. The headstock matches in colour only, because it's largely crack-free.

Another notable neck feature is the combination of fingerboard binding and pearly dot markers. The

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £10,995
DESCRIPTION Offset solidbody electric guitar. Made in the USA
BUILD Alder body with maple neck, bound rosewood fingerboard, 21 frets
HARDWARE Kluson tuners, vibrato tailpiece, Mustang bridge retrofit
ELECTRICS 2x single-coil pickups, volume, tone, 3-way switch, rhythm circuit
FINISH Ocean Turquoise
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.9mm at nut, 51.7mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.5mm at first fret, 21.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34mm at nut, 55.4mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.63kg/8.0lb
CONTACT ATB Guitars
atbguitars.com



former was introduced in late 1965 and blocks replaced the dots in mid 1966. With a March '66 neck date, a mid '66 serial number and potentiometer codes from the 12th week of 1966, everything appears correct and we're assured that all the solder joints are original and unbroken, too.

This Jazzmaster left the factory just prior to Fender's tuner change – rather than 'F' stamped machineheads, this example has the earlier double-line Klusons. The plastics are still a vibrant off-white and the gorgeously grained rosewood fingerboard shows no

IF YOU LIKE CANDY IN YOUR CASE, THIS GUITAR IS A TREAT. LIFTING THE COMPARTMENT LID REVEALS A PERIOD COILED LEAD AND THE ORIGINAL STRAP, TOTALLY UNUSED

traces of wear. The neck lacquer probably looks much as it did when the guitar was new and the frets are similarly unworn.

It appears that Fender made an attempt at fret nibs, but they have either worn away or, more likely, the nibs weren't particularly prominent in the first place. The nut nibs are a curious feature, and the fretwire appears a tad wider than the super-skinny stuff seen on earlier Fenders.

If you like candy in your case, this guitar is a treat. Lifting the compartment lid reveals a period coiled lead and the original strap, which is totally unused. There are also two 1966-67 Fender catalogues, which are fascinating period pieces.

One features stylised paintings of hip country types and women in striped trousers dancing to a beat combo. The other shows wholesome young men playing acoustics, while sitting on an open-top sports car in the California sunshine. If that's how Fender

OPPOSITE Displayed with case candy, this 1966 Jazzmaster is an arresting sight. Fine lacquer-checking lines add an aura of age to a beautifully preserved musical instrument

ABOVE The matching headstock has a perfectly preserved decal and the early double-line Kluson tuners

MIDDLE This 1966 model's fretwire seems to be thicker than on other vintage examples

BOTTOM Fingerboard binding and dot markers are a relatively rare pairing – blocks replaced the dots in mid 1966

IT'S FUN TO CONTEMPLATE WHY SOME GUITARS SURVIVE UNSCATHED, WHILE OTHERS WERE PLAYED TO DEATH – EITHER WAY, THIS SOUNDS TREMENDOUS

ABOVE Tuning stability and intonation are not a problem, probably aided by the replacement bridge unit and unworn frets

saw its demographic, we can only wonder what old Leo would have made of J Mascis and Kevin Shields…

IN USE

Some Fenders have a distinct tone and feel before you even plug them in. This Jazzmaster is exactly as expected, with a bendy elasticity, a twangy and woody tone and plenty of sustain. An old Mustang bridge retrofit may be helping with stability, because the strings stay put – even when they're thrashed – and tuning remains stable with heavy trem use.

All the electronics work properly and the pickups produce a warm and full tone with ample fidelity. There's a useful contrast between the two units, with the bridge producing a snappy sparkle and the neck capturing more of the guitar's acoustic tone.

In between, it's phase-cancelling and since the pickups have little to no microphony, it behaves impeccably with fuzz. We also get pretty lost in reverb and tremolo while testing through a '66 Princeton Reverb, because there's nothing more atmospheric than a fine Jazzmaster. Raising the height of the pickups would no doubt improve the tone, but that would probably entail replacing the foam beneath. All things considered, this guitar does everything you could ask of a Jazzmaster and we particularly like the even depth of the rounded neck.

It's fun to contemplate why some vintage guitars survive almost unscathed, while others were played to death. The 'people only played the good ones' theory is demonstrably nonsensical – the instrument featured here has simply been cherished or ignored for most of its life. It's a pleasure to play and sounds tremendous.

Without meaning to detract from its playability and impressive tone, we devoted much of our attention to this guitar's finish. There's no escaping the fact that it accounts for a substantial part of its appeal to collectors and as a result, it commands a price that's much loftier than a sunburst equivalent.

Ocean Turquoise is something special and we're baffled that it wasn't more popular at the time. As collectable Jazzmasters go, this is a prime example with all the extras, and a worrying temptation for Shoegazers of a certain age. G

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SHOW ME THE MONEY

Winter NAMM might be the biggest, but it certainly isn't the only guitar show in town in Southern California in late January. The SoCal World Guitar Show takes place in Orange County and attracts vintage-guitar dealers and enthusiasts from around the globe – not least a certain blues-rock guitarist named Bonamassa, who this year was exhibiting a fine selection of blonde Gibsons…

PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

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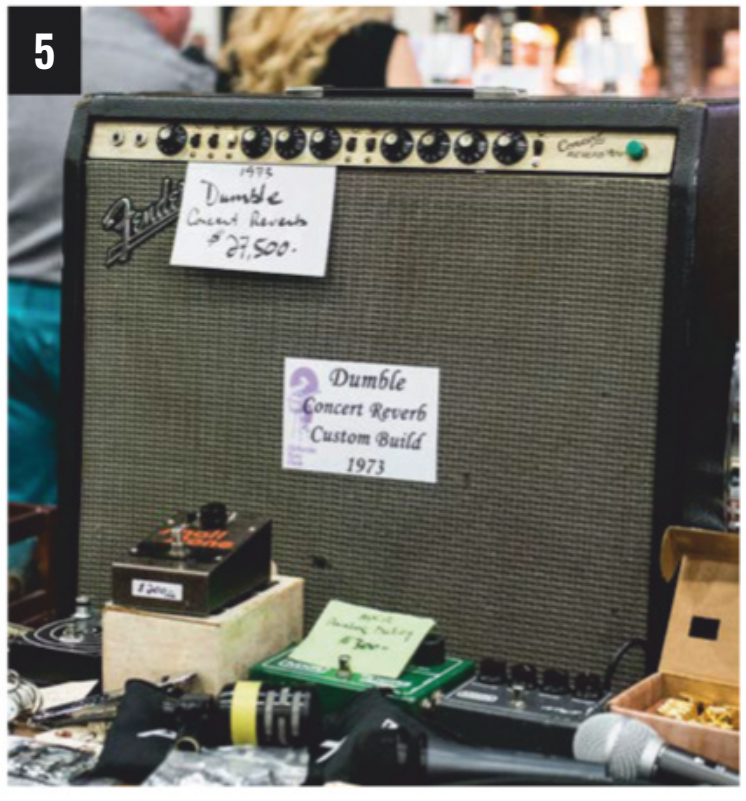

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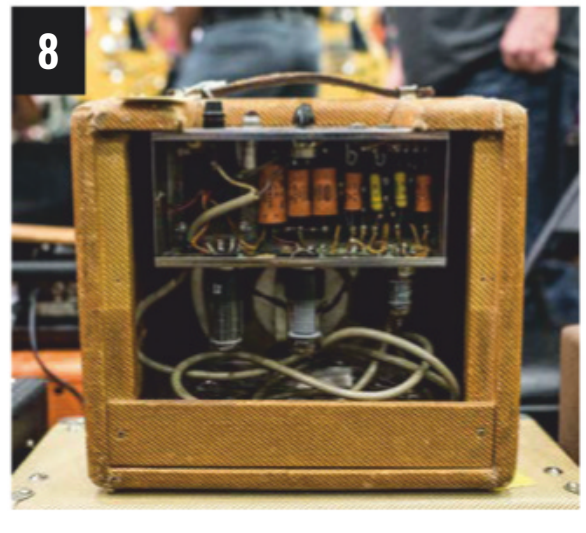


1 If we could take home only one, it might just be that Bigsby-equipped ES-330 on the left...

2 A '67 Smuggler's Tele with its stash showing, thanks to the clear pickguard

3 Glitzy (and rarely seen) Vox amps in gold-sparkle Tolex

4 Who doesn't love a Goldtop that looks like it's seen some hard living?

5 Touched by the hand of Dumble himself, a custom Concert Reverb from 1973

6 The ES-225 is a much-underrated beast, and this '56 is from the Bonamassa collection

7 This early '56 Strat was priced at a shade under $28,000

8 Originality is vitally important to vintage-amp collectors

9 It's not just about unobtanium, there's (slightly) more affordable vintage gear on display, too

10 A blonde Fender Bandmaster with matching 'piggyback' cabinet

11 Just a couple of Guild T-Birds hanging out in Orange County

12 This gorgeous original wraptail Goldtop was one of our 'best in show'

13 A 1959/'60 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster poses casually alongside a '65 Firebird III, both perfectly illustrating the breadth of the company's output during its Golden Era

14 More of Joe Bonamassa's blonde Gibsons wow the assembled crowds, including a rare double-neck under the Nerdville sign that has become a fixture at the SoCal World Guitar Show

INDUSTRY INSIDER

NANOLOG AUDIO INC

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

Founded by a pair of PhD research officers from the National Institute for Nanotechnology in Alberta, Canada, Nanolog is bringing cutting-edge science to analogue effects pedals. Founder Adam Bergen tells us more

How did you initially get into guitar?
"I have been into guitars ever since my father brought home his old Kent electric when I was about 10. I learned to play using a wall chord chart, and just kept going! Then when I was in high school, I began playing with friends in bands. This continued into graduate school, where guitar tinkering was what kept me sane pursuing a PhD in Analytical Chemistry by researching electrochemical methods to use nano-modified electrodes."

When did you first start building gear?
"While I was in graduate school, that's when I first built my own guitar. I also rebuilt some amps then, my prized jewel being a 1979 Fender Champ. It was around that time that I started to build pedals, too. But I didn't get too seriously into that until around 2010, when I started building fuzz pedals to my liking."

What was the moment you realised that you could turn your hobby into a business?
"When I was working on improving the sound of a Boss SD-1 for my own use, I realised what I'd been researching scientifically could be useful in the pedal! At first, on paper at least, it looked like this new carbon device would give me the exact sound I was looking for. So, when I tried it on my home rig, I was blown away when it worked. I figured since I was a tone geek, that others people who were into tweaking things would also like it.

"It really helped that the National Research Council sponsored a project that involved Dr Scientist and it was a great honour to work with such a great builder. They even made him sign an NDA – we couldn't talk about the 'prototype' project until all of the patent filings went through. Such a great experience in my life and it all went by so fast, with so many things to worry about, that I look back with an equal measure of wonder and amazement!"

Were there any investors/schemes/grants etc, which provided a springboard?
"We're fortunate that a few partners put up some money, and we were able to leverage the Alberta Innovation System through some grants. This was especially important for getting devices made in a scaled-up way (still working on that!), as well as helping to bring onboard our rockstar VP of sales and marketing."

At what point did you feel like you 'nailed' your branding?
"After Adam Brown took over our efforts here, I feel like we're in great hands. Our new Carbon Series is a great step in a new direction, and the feedback we've gotten so far has been phenomenal."

Tell us how your best-selling product so far came about?
"Our best-selling product is our overdrive, which is a combination of features that Dr Scientist included in the original prototype (like the ability to switch clipping options). It is also inspired by some of my favourite types of overdrives, like the Timmy. I've always liked overdrive… so that's where things really started for us.

"We needed a way to have multiple clipping options to show off our carbon Nanolog Devices: that was the main thing, being able to choose between silicon, germanium, and carbon. When you select a particular clipping option, the only thing that changes is that one Device. We had to really work to get the bass entering the clipping section as well as the gain structure of the clipping section just right, so there is some balance between the four different clipping options. But, for me, I'm always thinking about what can be better, so I am hopeful that our next run will include even more tweaks… always a work in progress!"

What's your proudest moment as a maker?
"There are a few here, actually. When a customer writes in to let us know that they

Nanolog Audio Inc's range makes use of proprietary 'quantum tunnelling' and 'carbon clipping' technology

like the product, I always smile and enjoy that our efforts can bring people joy. But really, when Tom Cram from Spiral Electric Effects wrote in to tell us that he loved how our devices sounded in a circuit he was developing, I felt very much understood. And just being a part of doing something so crazy and out there has to be the top moment for sure… But working with Dr Scientist and playing that first chord through a breadboard prototype in his workshop was something I'll never forget!"

What do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities for the guitar industry in 2019?

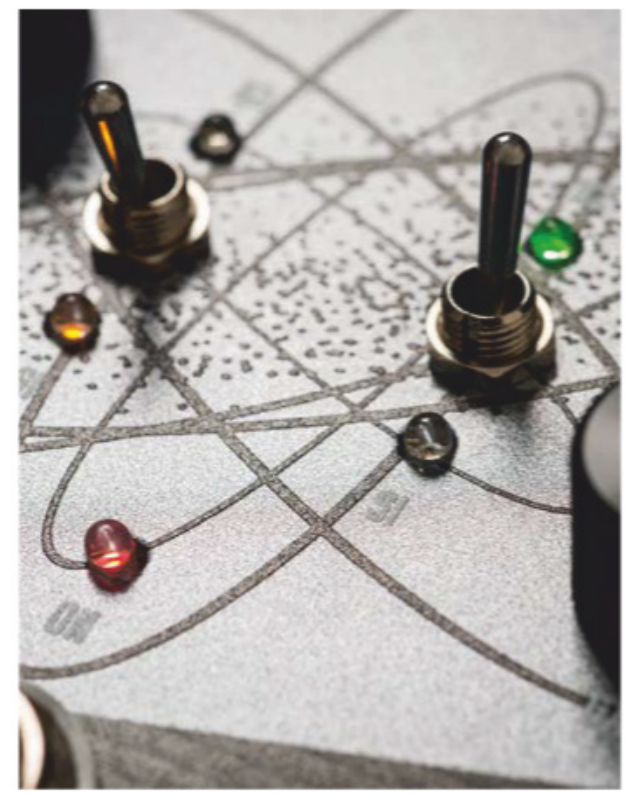
"A big challenge is the sheer number of things out there. So many great builders, so many great products! But I guess, in a way I feel that this is a good thing, and that it is also an opportunity. Finding ways to make things that people enjoy is what this is all about!"

Can you give us any details of your plans for the future?

"We have big plans for 2019, for sure. We're working on new products of all types, but starting first with a 'mini' series that will allow people interested in our carbon technology to get involved without taking up much board real estate and in a lower price range. We also have some limited-run special-edition products in the pipeline that will feature a new upgraded 'N3' carbon setting. And we're always looking for other builders to collaborate with. Now that we're a little more established and have had other builders like Dr Scientist, Southampton, Spiral Effects, Red Sun FX, and Lauren Audio experiment with our carbon devices, we're really hoping to get one of the bigger builders onboard, like EQD or Wampler. And maybe this will be the year we finally experiment with some amp building!" G

For more on Nanolog, visit nanologaudio.com

"WORKING WITH DR SCIENTIST AND PLAYING THAT FIRST CHORD THROUGH A BREADBOARD PROTOTYPE IN HIS WORKSHOP WAS SOMETHING THAT I'LL NEVER FORGET!"



SHOP TALK

MIKE KENNEDY AND HOLGER NOTZEL

AMP MAKERS, KOMET AMPLIFICATION

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

ABOVE Mike Kennedy of Komet Amplification at work on one of his "first-class battleships"

FACING PAGE Holger Notzel, the 'other half' of Komet Amplification. All of Komet's amps are built to exacting standards, with military-grade components and meticulous hand-wiring

Baton Rouge-based Komet Amplification craft a range of exactingly made and stunning-sounding boutique amps. We hear from the company's founders about how they're keeping the traditions of their much-missed mentor alive

Those who can, teach. Ken Fischer could, and he did – and while his skill and creations were taken from us too soon, after the completion of around 100 Trainwreck amplifiers, he passed a huge amount of know-how along to the men behind Komet Amplification, which has continued to fly the flag ever since.

Baton Rouge, Louisiana native Mike Kennedy and German expat Holger Notzel met while attending Louisiana State University in the early 1990s and quickly discovered they shared an obsession with vintage guitars and valve electronics. Following Notzel's emigration to the USA with his wife later that decade, they opened Riverfront Music a stone's throw from the Mississippi River in Baton Rouge, and founded Komet Amplification in '98.

Inspired by the work of Trainwreck Circuits amp guru Ken Fischer and bolstered by his contribution to early designs, Komet was off to a flying start in the competitive boutique market, and was regarded from the beginning as a leader in tone-driven professional guitar amplification. Its debut model, the Komet 60, earned modern-classic status almost overnight. Notzel and Kennedy pushed the premise further, expanding the line-up with new and original designs that pulsed with the DNA of their late mentor, while exploring avenues Fischer might never have ventured into.

LEARNING CURVE

Like a lot of budding amp makers, both Kennedy and Notzel began their education early on and in the usual DIY fashion, largely by sticking their hands where they didn't belong. Born in 1966, Kennedy grew up in a music-loving household; by the age of four, he was requesting songs from his aunt and older sister's collections of LPs by The Doors, The Beatles and The Monkees. In 1974, he and older brother Patrick became Beatles fanatics and the elder Kennedy indulged the bug by getting into guitar playing.

"Patrick bought an old 60s Kay electric guitar – later replaced by a brand-new '77 Stratocaster in natural ash finish with black pickguard – and a '71 Dual Showman," Kennedy recalls. "That Dual Showman is what ignited my passion for electronics… Then

I heard *Sunshine Of Your Love* by Cream for the first time – my passion became a quest for '*that sound*!'"

By "ignited", Kennedy might partly mean "forced my exploration into electronics", driven as he was to repair the faulty Silverface Fender he was soon borrowing for his own garage band. "The vibrato effect and the Normal channel's Bass control were both non-functional," he tells us, "and this drove me crazy. When I was around 13, I removed the chassis and started to learn what was what and tried to figure out why these did not function. I eventually found a cold solder joint in the vibrato circuit, and lo and behold! It began to work!" A thorough re-capping with orange drops also took care of the busted Bass control, and taught Kennedy some early lessons on the significance of different components, but it was his acquisition of a Marshall JCM800 2x12 combo that took him to 'the other side'. It still wasn't quite *that tone*, but it fuelled a predilection for British amplification that would plot a roadmap toward Komet.

For Notzel's part, he's simply been into vintage guitars and amps as long as he can remember, and that fanaticism extended to repairing guitars as a side gig to help make his way through college. "In Germany," he says, "Marshalls and Voxes were fairly common, and you really didn't have any problems finding an old AC30 for very little money. So I got into collecting vintage amps fairly early on, but I was never 100 per cent happy with any one of them. I had my favourites, but they all did something that I didn't like."

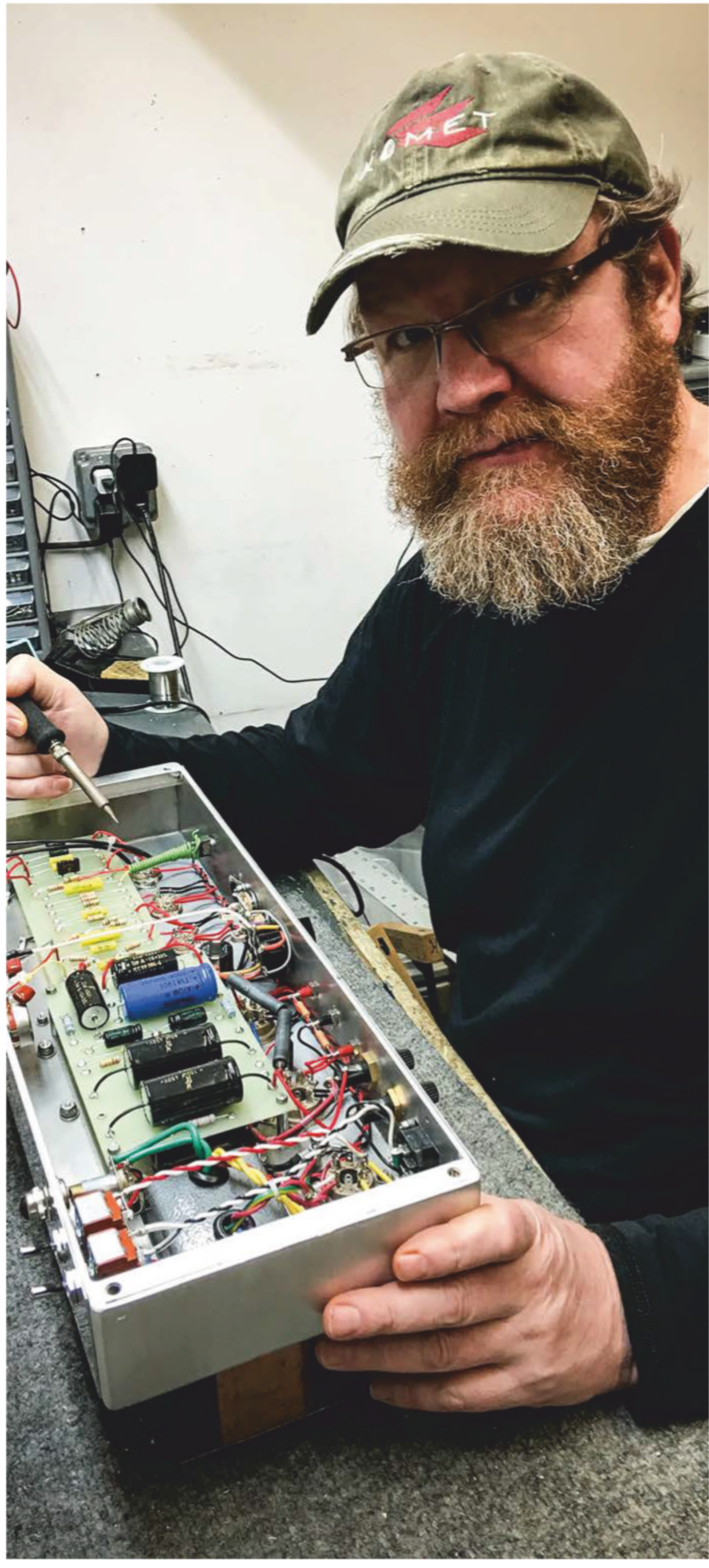
LIKE A TRAINWRECK

Once Notzel had transplanted his passions to the States and made Kennedy's acquaintance, he also started pursuing legendary builder Fischer, and even got himself on the list for a Trainwreck amp. Sadly, given Fischer's chronic health issues, it eventually became clear that order would never be fulfilled.

However, Notzel had had enough conversations with Fischer by this point, and had developed enough of a rapport, that he figured he could go straight to the coalface. "At that point, I thought, 'Let's just build an amp!'" Notzel declares. "I decided that after all these years of knowing what I liked in a vintage amp and knowing what I don't like and what goes wrong with them, I was just going to put all that together and build an amp that didn't have the shortcomings of the vintage amps, but had all the good stuff."

Taking inspiration from Fischer's Trainwreck Express in some regards, Notzel put that amp together, and the results were enthusiastically received by the stream of guitarists who wandered into Riverside Music, which was then still just a guitar and amp repair shop.

Meanwhile, Kennedy had also soaked up as much of Fischer's thinking as possible via his articles in the *Angela Papers* (published by Angela Electronics), and by now shared Notzel's fanaticism for British amps,



ABOVE A Komet Concorde with a custom wood front panel, together with a '64 Gibson SG

FACING PAGE Mike Kennedy builds the majority of Komet Amps and describes himself as a 'neat freak' when it comes to circuit assembly

and all things JMI-Vox in particular. Notzel and Kennedy figured they might just go into production with the thing. They sent it to Fischer for a once-over, and he applied a few tweaks here and there, stuck a Trainwreck sticker on it, and returned it with the approval: "All right, go ahead!"

From there, however, Komet amps followed very much their own building style – albeit taking some advice from Fischer. It was an approach that involved sourcing the highest-quality everything for the builds, provided that everything also sounded good.

QUALITY COUNTS

"Our approach to Komet was to take into account all the design and production errors, or mistakes, made by amplifier companies back in the day and at the current time, and incorporate that knowledge from years of servicing into circuit design and build techniques," says Kennedy. "For example, we knew those places within certain amp models and circuits where failure would repeatedly occur. You would say to yourself: 'If they would have just used a five-watt resistor here instead of a one-watt, they wouldn't have had that model recall…'"

Even while adding Fischer's knowledge to the formula, though, Kennedy says, Komet construction was done "our own way. We chose the chassis style, components and cosmetics. This separated us from Ken and his builds and Trainwreck cosmetics. I would build and wire a Komet in my own way, Holger would build one in his way, then Ken would throw pointers in here and there: 'Shorten this wire lead here… use this capacitor brand there.' But as time progressed and we built more and more, we would have one of many 'Trainwreck epiphanies', where you say to yourself, 'Ah, that's why Ken did it like that!' Then we would call Ken and tell him that we figured out this or that… and I can still hear him giggling over the phone, or on occasion, say: 'I told you so!'"

Aside from the heavenly tone and tactile dynamic range achieved by plugging into a Komet amplifier, the thing that often makes the next biggest impression – on those who get a chance to look inside the chassis – is the quality of the parts used, and the painstaking construction that joins them all together. For his part, Kennedy, who builds most Komet amps today, admits to being a neat freak, and one with a pet peeve for substandard components.

"I do not necessarily imply that your amplifier build has to be neat on the inside to sound good," Kennedy adds. "I've seen and repaired some 'fantastic circuit nightmares' that happened to sound exceptional. But one should always design a proper layout before building an amplifier. A well-designed amplifier circuit is easier to build and service, always. In the end, if I am to build it, it is going to be a first-class battleship. That's just the way I do things."

In addition to the superbly neat and linear chassis layouts, this propensity for quality shows itself prominently in the ingredients that go into any and every Komet. Notable parts include NKK switches, sealed military-grade two-watt PEC potentiometers, silver-tinned Teflon hookup wire, F&T filter capacitors, custom-designed transformers and a range of high-end signal capacitors, all housed in quarter-inch, laser-cut, military-grade aluminum chassis.

Sticklers for quality that they are, Kennedy and Notzel still find room to admire the work of other amp builders today. "I've also always admired with work of Randall Aiken and Bob Gjika," Kennedy says. Notzel adds: "I love what I saw and heard from Mark Bartel's new line of amps. Beautiful craftsmanship and really great, unique sounds."

SUPER MODELS

In addition to the perennial Komet 60 and the hot-rodded Concorde (which followed on from a Limited

Edition partially designed for Komet by Fischer), the brand has had good success with the dual-EL84 Komet 19 and quad-EL84 Aero 33, Songwriter 30, and Komet 29 models, but Notzel and Kennedy's strict quality ethos forced from production an amp that was many players' favourite.

The Constellation, which had a footswitch-engaged, 12AX7-derived lead channel that has been described as the voice of the rock gods, was also known for its succulent, thick, rich clean channel, and that relied upon the octal-based 6SN7 preamp tube – long out of production. Examples are thin on the ground, and expensive when found in its NOS guise. When you do plonk down the serious cash for a rare 6SN7, chances are excessive vibration will send it over the microphonic edge sooner than later.

"If you have a Constellation and found some great 6SN7s," Notzel advises, "it would be best to keep the amp head off the cabinet to avoid rattling the tubes as much as possible. There's a chance that one day I will redesign the amp. The Songwriter 30 achieves a spectacular clean tone using a 12AX7 that could be the basis for channel one of a future Constellation MkII. But there is a special magic about the sound of the 6SN7 that is difficult to duplicate."

Among new products already out there, Kennedy says he's extremely excited about the K.O.D.A pedal (for Komet Over Drive Amplifier), the company's first pedal offering. It's something unique in the OD world in its use of multiple, highly controllable gain stages. In addition, the AmbiKab and AmbiKab Jr. have won plenty of fans since their introduction a couple of years ago. Designed to be an all-in-one wet-dry solution for guitarists seeking to use time-based effects without diluting their direct overdrive tones, the AmbiKab splits your amplifier's speaker out to directly feed two traditional guitar speakers while tapping off a signal to send via your effects of choice, then return it to the unit's internal stereo amp and stereo speakers.

BIG BOTTOM

Other than that, Notzel has been in design mode lately, and plans to get another fully fledged Komet amplifier onto the market soon. "In my own personal life as a guitar player, I favour big, clean tones," he says. "I love clarity, big bottom, and sparkling, bubbly trebles. So a couple years back, I designed an amp strictly for myself. It runs a pair of KT88 tubes – my favourite next to EL84s – in Class A, cathode biased with no negative feedback. The amp has a very special big output transformer that weighs 18lb by itself!

"I grew up gigging tweed Bassmans, JTM45s and especially Vox AC30s, and this amp is my interpretation of a combination of these classic sounds. I spent a lot of time fine-tuning the feel of the amp as much as the sound itself. It's just a beautiful, musical, balanced, and huge sound. I got addicted to this amp and it's become the basis of my sound since. We haven't put it out there yet, because it's a big amp without master volume… But it is just such a great sound I think we'll finally do a run of them. It is honestly the best sounding and feeling amp I know of."

Another amp in the prototype stages goes in the other direction, but still taps the KT88 – a single tube in a single-ended, Class A rock amp with master volume, the first time Komet has ever put MV on an amp. "This will be an amp for guys who play at home or want to record with a smaller amp. The output transformer in this little beast is actually the same physical size as the one in a Komet 60, so it has a very big sound, big bottom, and a surprising amount of punch, and with the master dimed it's plenty loud enough for smaller gigs, even if you don't mic it.

"You can see the trend here; I'm just enamoured with KT88 tubes right now. To me, they sound like a Mack truck-sized EL84."

"A WELL-DESIGNED AMPLIFIER CIRCUIT IS EASIER TO BUILD AND SERVICE, ALWAYS. IN THE END, IF I AM TO BUILD IT, IT IS GOING TO BE A FIRST-CLASS BATTLESHIP"

ALTERNATIVE OFFSETS

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

If you love offset-guitar chic but don't fancy a Jaguar or Jazzmaster, there are plenty of alternatives. Here's the best of what's available from the boutique world…

1 FANO STANDARD JM6

Dennis Fano set the standard for boutique, factory-aged guitars that borrow from the past but have a strong identity of their own. Taking a Jazzmaster-style chassis, simplifying the controls and adding Gibson-style pickup and bridge options proved to be a hit – although Dennis himself has since moved on from the company that bears his name, Fano continues to make some of the most beautiful and playable offset guitars around.

2 COLLINGS 360 LT

The late, great Bill Collings is primarily associated with instruments with Gibson in their DNA, and the 360 LT fuses an LP Special with offset character. With Collings' typical set-neck and 24 7/8-inch scale-length construction, the premium Mastery hardware and sleek contours make the 360 LT feel like a true hybrid, while its compact size is ideal for those who find the Jazzmaster's body rather unwieldy.

3 NOVO SERUS J

Based in Nashville, the aforementioned Dennis Fano and his small team are creating some of the world's finest bolt-on boutique electrics. Dennis describes this as "the offset reimagined", and with its angular horns and batwing pickguard, it certainly has a 'parallel universe' vibe. Reclaimed pine bodies, tempered maple necks, numerous custom options and aged nitro finishes give these guitars a vibe all of their own.

4 BILT S.S. ZAFTIG

Few Fender designs failed to catch on in the end, but the Starcaster is certainly one that remains niche in its appeal. However, it's the influence of Fender's 1970s offset semi that makes this Bilt model a little different. Sporting twin humbuckers, semi-solid construction and a sweeping two-step headstock, the striking S.S. Zaftig melds Starcaster, Jazzmaster and Jaguar features into a design that's a whole lotta offset fun.

5 RIVOLTA MONDATA STANDARD

It's that man Dennis Fano once again! The Rivolta brand is a collaboration between the offset maestro and Canada's Eastwood Guitars, and has resulted in some wonderful and affordable retro-inspired instruments. The Mondata is no exception – the chambered mahogany body has a whiff of the Firebird about it, and that's backed up by a trio of mini-humbuckers that offer an array of surprisingly hi-fi tones.

JENNINGS VOYAGER DELUXE

6 Jennings Guitars produces some truly individual takes on the offset concept, but the Voyager Deluxe might just be the best of the lot. With its compact semi-hollow body and two-step headstock, the Voyager Deluxe borrows from a whole host of Fender models such as the Mustang, Jazzmaster and Starcaster, but stellar build and superb McNelly pickups make this a great platform for hip surf-rockers and indie noiseniks.

TRUSSART STEELMASTER

7 James Trussart refuses to do things the easy way, and his take on the classic offset is no exception. The SteelMaster has a chambered wooden body that's topped with a recessed steel plate, and while it looks like nothing else on earth, it's not just about aesthetics. The combination of chambered body and steel top delivers a killer tonality that's suited to blues, raucous rock, and virtually everything in between.

SHELTON GALAXYFLITE BLASTER

8 Shelton Electric Instruments is based in Frederick, Maryland and makes some fine takes on classic instruments, not least this GalaxyFlite Blaster. Mastery hardware, stunning paintjobs and ageing are par for the course in this price range, but the ace up Shelton's sleeve is the company's clever reworking of the Jazzmaster's quirky stock electronics to provide bass roll-off, series switching and a 'sweet spot' tone control. G

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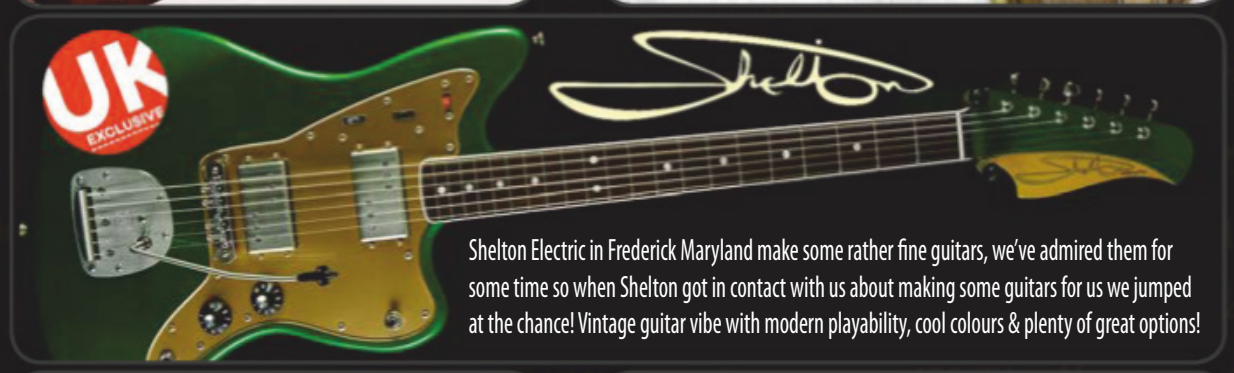

Shelton Electric in Frederick Maryland make some rather fine guitars, we've admired them for some time so when Shelton got in contact with us about making some guitars for us we jumped at the chance! Vintage guitar vibe with modern playability, cool colours & plenty of great options!

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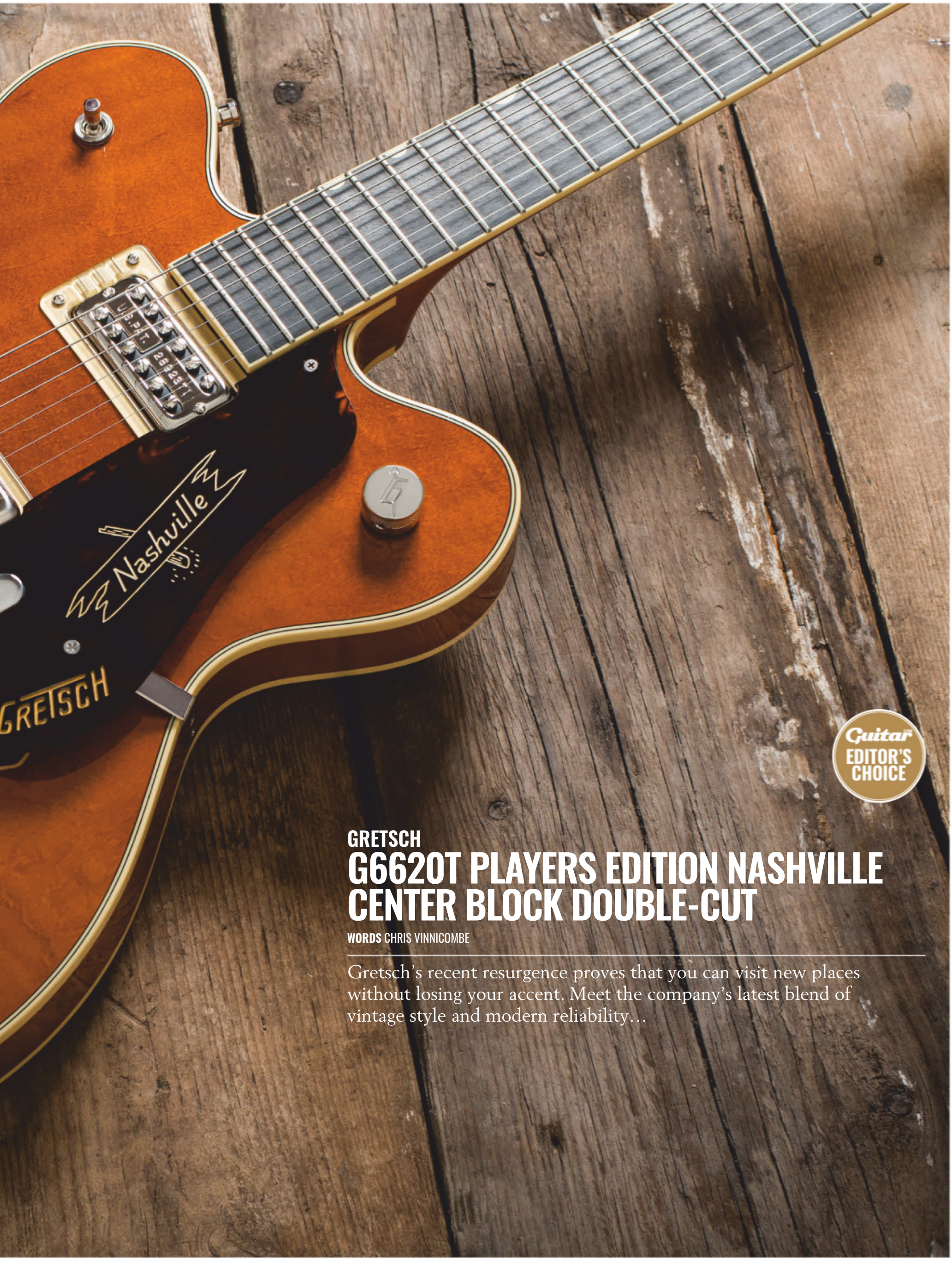

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

GRETSCH
G6620T PLAYERS EDITION NASHVILLE CENTER BLOCK DOUBLE-CUT

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Gretsch's recent resurgence proves that you can visit new places without losing your accent. Meet the company's latest blend of vintage style and modern reliability…

The String-Thru Bigsby makes string changes a breeze compared to traditional units

Blending cowboy-kitsch styling cues from the company's past with a spec sheet modern rock guitarists can get on board with, the G6620T delivers 'that great Gretsch tone' from a business-class seat – unlike the rollercoaster ride of old. Our favourite model in Gretsch's NAMM 2019 collection, this instrument represents the brand's newest evolution of its centre-block equipped, double-cutaway semi-hollow format.

After pop morphed into rock in the lysergic Petri dish of the late 1960s, Gretsch – much like Rickenbacker – found itself somewhat sidelined. Though cool, for many mainstream rockers, Gretsch six-strings became regarded as 'special effect' instruments that would be pulled out for a tune or two, but weren't robust enough for the new world of low-slung guitars and high gain.

A handful of high-profile players, such as Malcolm Young and Billy Duffy, managed to made it work. But when the time came to rock out, most guitarists would reach for another G-brand. Yet for a certain stripe of rockabilly outlaw, Gretsch is still the only guitar company that matters.

Over the past couple of decades, a mod-hungry subculture has thrived. Rock 'n' roll gunslingers not only discovered innovative hardware and electronics solutions from the likes of TV Jones and Tru-Arc Bridgeworks, but also forums where like-minded Gretsch fans dispense advice on maintenance and keeping them under control at stage volume.

But wouldn't it be nice to drop a couple of grand on a guitar and find that it doesn't need to be modded or upgraded, or have foam stuffed into it for loud live use? Happily, back in 2013, Gretsch launched a series of Center Block instruments designed to tackle feedback issues, while the more recent Players Edition upgrades saw such luxuries as String-Thru Bigsby tailpieces and paper-in-oil tone caps enter the fray.

At first glance, the G6620T seems to be a Nashville-ised version of the G6137TCB Panther Center Block model. However, look closer and there are subtle differences that nudge it closer to Gibson's thinline designs.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,389 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Semi-hollow double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in Japan
BUILD Laminated maple top, back and sides with chambered spruce centre-block. Set maple neck with 12-inch radius ebony fingerboard, 22 medium-jumbo frets and Graph Tech Tusq XL nut
HARDWARE Adjusto-Matic bridge, Bigsby B7CP String-Thru vibrato tailpiece, Gotoh locking tuners
ELECTRICS 2x High Sensitive Filter'Tron pickups with individual volumes, no-load master tone control, master volume with treble bleed, 3-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.6"/625mm
NECK WIDTH 43.3mm at nut, 53.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.4mm at first fret, 23.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.5mm at nut, 50.6mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.58kg/7.94lb
FINISH Round-Up Orange gloss urethane
CONTACT Fender EMEA
gretschguitars.com

This Nashville and the now-discontinued Panther models were hand-built in the same small Terada facility in Kanie, Japan. They share a double-cutaway body design that's approximately 400mm in width and 44mm deep at the edges, but the string geometry is

The headstock's abalone horseshoe inlay is set into a flame-maple fascia

different. Where the Panther's bridge sits on a pinned rosewood base and the fingerboard floats from between the 19th-20th fret onwards, the 2019 Nashville model has a lower profile, and is further removed from a traditional archtop as a result.

While the Panther's strings are some 20mm from the top in the area between the pickups, the Nashville model has a clearance of around 14mm. Its Adjusto-Matic bridge is fitted directly to the body and the neck join is more like an ES-335, with no air under the end of the fingerboard, while the Bigsby B7CP's tension bar gives a break angle across the bridge more akin to a stopbar than the shallower string angle created by the Panther's B6C.

The Nashville's Round-Up Orange finish is Gretsch in excelsis, and other visual elements such as the enlarged and bound f-holes, the aged pearloid Neo-Classic thumbnail inlays in the ebony fretboard and the engraved tortoiseshell pickguard contribute to a classic Gretsch look that's not *too* chintzy. At the headstock, with its Gretsch logo and horseshoe motif inlaid in abalone, the flame-maple fascia adds further flamboyance, but locking Gotoh tuners are present to steady the ship.

IN USE

The typically slim-and-sleek neck provides largely unimpeded access to its upper reaches and the G6620T has plenty of acoustic sustain and clarity. Our own centre-block-equipped G6137TCB has very similar specifications and the same High Sensitive Filter'Tron pickups – it's an opportunity to find out how much difference the neck-to-body join, no-load tone control and paper-in-oil capacitor make to the Nashville's sound.

After spending some time with the Panther, we switch to the Nashville model. The Players Edition instrument immediately offers a smoother experience with more sustain; you can't only hear it – you can feel it under your fingers, too.

The Panther is perhaps a little more explosive, with more attack and more of a snarl, but the even decay offered by the

Aged pearloid Neo-Classic thumbnail inlays adorn the ebony fingerboard

The High Sensitive Filter'Trons can handle anything from clean to mean

Nashville model gives the impression that a tasteful helping of subtle, slow-release compression has been dialled in.

It's a smoother ride for blues lead playing, too, with a greater palette of tones available thanks to more effective onboard controls. The no-load tone control has a much more useful taper, while the master volume's treble-bleed circuit retains clarity when turned down – ideal for those who get their drive tones from a cranked amplifier and want to clean up without turning to mush.

It'll still do fireworks, of course. Despite the myriad aftermarket Filter'Tron-style humbuckers available and the numerous in-house variations developed by Gretsch, we still think these High Sensitive units have a lot to offer. Underrated and versatile, they can go from Johnny Marr to AC/DC, or George Harrison to Jack White in a heartbeat. It's a great guitar for heavier alt-rock styles, too, with a saw-toothed combination of power and grit that works brilliantly for aggressive QOTSA-style rhythms and white-knuckle lead.

The irony is that modern stage-volume limitations and sophisticated monitoring systems mean it's easier to use a fully hollow Gretsch in a live environment now than it has been at any time since the 1950s. But the company's latest Center Block models offer a very different and arguably more universally appealing playing experience.

By any measure, the G6620T is an extremely versatile, great-sounding electric with a classic aesthetic – it even represents decent value for money when you consider that our Panther model retailed for almost £600 more back in 2013.

9/10 **A versatile step forward for Center Block models that retains its Gretsch character**

The tortoiseshell 'guard features this classic Western motif

The neck join contributes to the guitar's smooth sustain

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MAYBACH
JAZPOLE 63

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

This attention-grabbing offset isn't as far removed from Maybach's Lester models as you might think… but can it bridge the gap between the big F and the big G?

The Maybach JazPole 63 is a Jazzmaster-shaped guitar, but those expecting traditional offset performance should look elsewhere. Fender's offset-bodied models are nothing if not divisive, but Maybach's intention with this guitar seems to be the exact opposite.

Like the Fano JM6, the JazPole strips things down and combines Fender and Gibson features. So we get that timeless, sweeping body shape with the bolt-on maple/rosewood neck and 25.5-inch scale length familiar to Tele and Strat fans, matched with a bridge/tailpiece combo and PAF-inspired humbuckers that could have been ripped right out of an old Les Paul.

Maybach is perhaps best known for its interpretations of classic Gibson designs, with Eastern European manufacturing facilitating high-end specs at prices that undercut the American boutique brigade. The JazPole is the only model in its range that really goes 'off template'.

The basics, then. The body is made of poplar, an affordable alternative to alder that's not renowned for being especially lively but sounds fine in plenty of Mexican-made Fenders. Finish-wise, it's a light relic – you'd guess it had done more than a handful of gigs, but not with Pete Townshend.

There's some nice crazing on the paintwork and just a few tasteful dings revealing a coat of red below the black – yep, it's a virtual refin. While the bridge and tailpiece are lightly tarnished, the pickup covers are rather less so. The satin-finished neck has been left pretty much 'as new', which is surely a good move – your left hand has work to do, and doesn't need to be distracted by uneven finishes and fake cigarette burns.

That neck is a reasonably hefty chunk, which – combined with the high-ish factory action on our review instrument – means this is not a guitar for the delicate of wrist. And there's not a lot of room for lowering the bridge: with the height-adjustment screws turned down until they're rubbing against the scratchplate, it's only just low enough to save us from thinking about neck-pocket shims. Plus the screws shouldn't really *be* rubbing against the scratchplate – they should pass through the holes for an extra millimetre or two of travel, only those holes aren't quite aligned properly. Nitpicking, this may be… but nits shouldn't be left unpicked at this price point.

Amber's Spirit of '59 humbuckers are designed to replicate Gibson's fabled PAFs

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,670 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody offset-waist guitar. Made in Czech Republic
BUILD Poplar body, bolt-on maple neck, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard with 22 medium-jumbo frets
HARDWARE Gotoh vintage-style tuners, aged Gotoh tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece
ELECTRICS 2x Amber Spirit of 59 humbuckers, 3-way switch, master volume and tone controls
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42mm at nut, 51.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36.5mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.4kg/7.5lb
FINISHES Vintage Black Aged (as reviewed), Vintage White Aged, Caddy Green Metallic Aged and Burgundy Mist Aged both £1,759
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT Maybach Guitars
maybach-guitars.de

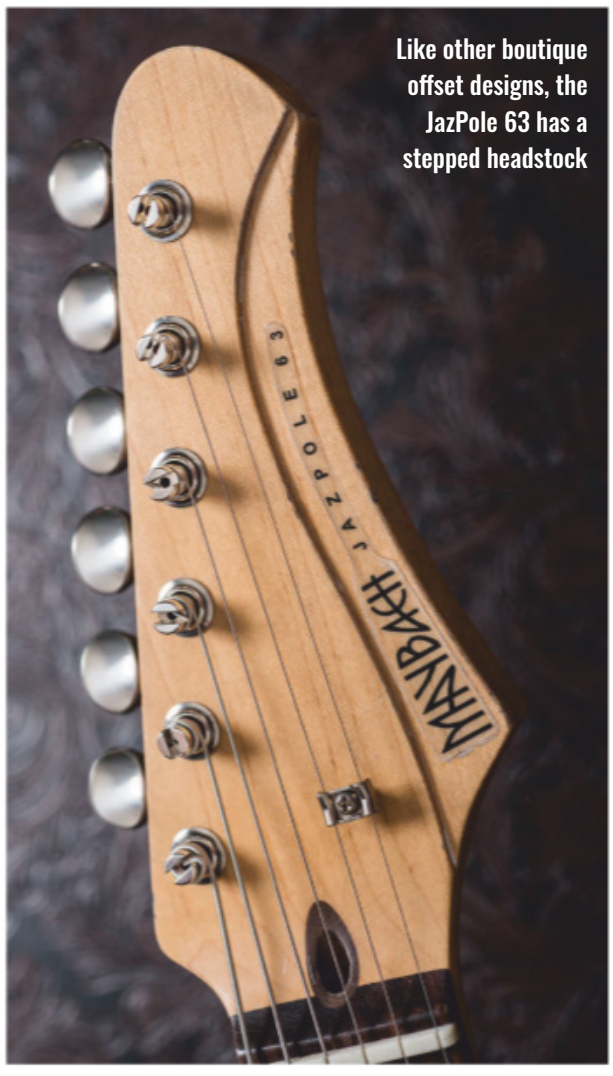
Anyway, with the action lowered just a touch, it's an agreeable player, with neatly dressed frets and a comfortable, well-balanced feel on the strap. In fact, the only truly annoying thing about playing this guitar is the way its body shape keeps making us want to reach for the non-existent Jazzmaster vibrato arm, like trying to scratch a phantom limb. That's not Maybach's fault, though… and you can specify a Bigsby B5 for an extra £240.

Speaking of options, the JazPole is also available with Gold Foil pickups or P-90s. These humbuckers should be pretty tasty. They're made by Amber – the German maker behind Patrice Vigier's favourite 'buckers – and these 'Spirit of 59' units are its most faithful recreation of the legendary PAF, using alnico IV magnets, scatterwound and unpotted.

IN USE

The first unplugged E chord reveals that this guitar has oodles of natural resonance, even if there isn't a whole lot of zing to be wrung out of that poplar body. It certainly doesn't have the percussive plunk of a Jazzmaster – and once we get amped up, it's clear this guitar is an offset in shape only.

With the neck pickup selected, there's a piano-like clarity to clean notes on the wound strings, matched by a smooth sweetness on the skinny ones. It's not the



Like other boutique offset designs, the JazPole 63 has a stepped headstock

The JazPole has an aged Gotoh tune-o-matic bridge, and the guitar has plenty of resonance

most characterful sound, but it proves that a well executed Fender/Gibson mash-up can produce some seriously expansive tones.

Switching to the middle position introduces an element of chime-y complexity, as you'd expect, but we're not talking about the same degree of detail you get from a good Telecaster. Next to our reference Les Paul – with similarly PAF-ish pickups – the JazPole sounds less intimate and more strident. That remains the case with the bridge unit in isolation: it's full and growly, rather than pert and spanky.

All of this is very nice but, depending on your tastes, you might just be missing a bit of excitement. Maybe a dash of overdrive? In fact, it takes more than a dash – we quickly move from Tube Screamer to RAT in search of rewarding rock action – but the good stuff is definitely there.

The RAT turns out to be a perfect partner for this rather treble-shy guitar, as it has enough top end for two: now the JazPole's innate smoothness and solidity will keep your tone safely grounded, even up to the 15th fret and beyond, while the pedal's crisp attack keeps you cutting through the mix.

It's still a less exhilarating ride than you might get from a Les Paul, an SG, or even a 25-inch-scale PRS; but if you're playing super-tight rock riffs, you might be glad of that. This is equally true in all three pickup positions, while the volume and tone pots are both well tapered.

What we have here is a high-class tool for delivering pure rocking tones with the emphasis on warmth and control. It's just a pity there isn't a little more treble content to play with – we're drooling at the thought of this instrument with a zingy ash body and a clucky coil-split option. **G**

8/10 **A classy all-rounder that excels at beefy overdriven tones**

The poplar body's lightly worn 'virtual refin' on display

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NOVO
MIRUS J

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Dennis Fano and his Nashville-based team are building some of the best bolt-on electrics on the planet right now. Time to get some air…

Our first encounter with Dennis Fano's Novo brand was in early 2016 and his achingly cool offsets have been the subject of much gear-lust in these parts ever since. The Mirus is the new kid on the block and is essentially a semi-hollow version of the solidbody Serus model. Although all Novos share the same basic outline, there's a huge level of aesthetic variation on offer thanks to a choice of pickups and hardware, a rainbow of finishes in various levels of distress and plenty more custom options besides.

Whether they've had Fano, Novo or Rivolta stamped on the headstock, Dennis' electric-guitar designs have long betrayed a love for both Fender offsets and Roger Rossmeisl-era Rickenbackers. The Mirus J is a wonderful collision of some of those styling cues: we have an offset-body outline that's Jazzmaster-like below the waist, while the pointed horns accentuate their Ricky DNA with authentically irregular checkerboard binding. It's reminiscent of a Fano RB6 Thinline we encountered a while back and *really* should have bought.

The tempered-pine body's raised grain looks fabulous under the thin nitrocellulose Cat's Eye Burst, and the Novo workshop's ageing job is impressively detailed, as always. The wear isn't just skin deep, either – it has major implications for playability.

Around the back of the medium-C maple neck (also heat treated, like the body), the burnished timber is a dead ringer for a heavily played and oxidised mid-60s Fender, both in look and feel. With the addition of a generous rollover at the edges of its purplish rosewood slab fingerboard and nicely rounded fret ends, the Mirus has the immediate familiarity of a vintage favourite and the playing experience is smooth and drag-free.

Back at the body end, things get a little less Fender and a lot more Gibson, thanks to a pair of Lollar mini-humbuckers mounted in Les Paul Deluxe-style rings and a Schroeder wrapover bridge, which incorporates six individually adjustable brass saddles. With just a master volume and tone and a three-way toggle pickup selector switch, the controls are simple.

When it comes to the build, proceedings are less straightforward. Aside from the aforementioned checkerboard binding that sits inside an additional plain outer strip (both somewhat nicotine-stained in

Lollar mini-humbuckers handle volume and gain better than vintage units

Individually adjustable brass saddles feature on the Schroeder wrapover bridge

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £4,199 (inc Mono Classic hybrid case)
DESCRIPTION Semi-hollow double-cutaway offset-body electric guitar. Made in USA
BUILD Tempered pine semi-hollow body with centre-block, bolt-on tempered maple neck with medium-C profile, 9.5-inch radius East Indian rosewood fingerboard with unbleached bone nut, clay dots and 22 Jescar 6125 frets
HARDWARE Schroeder wrapover bridge with individual brass saddles, Kluson vintage-style tuners
ELECTRICS 2x Lollar mini-humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector, volume, tone
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.3mm at nut, 51.2mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.6mm at first fret, 23.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 33.7mm at nut, 51.8mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.7kg/6.1lb
FINISH Cat's Eye Burst nitrocellulose with medium distress
CONTACT Coda Music
coda-music.com novoguitars.com

appearance, complete with dents, scratches and dirt) the body features a centre-block running all the way to the tail, while a subtle contour is created where the body thins out from around 45mm to 35mm deep in the forearm area. A more time-consuming and intricate manufacturing process always equates to extra cost, but the quality of the work exhibited here is exemplary.

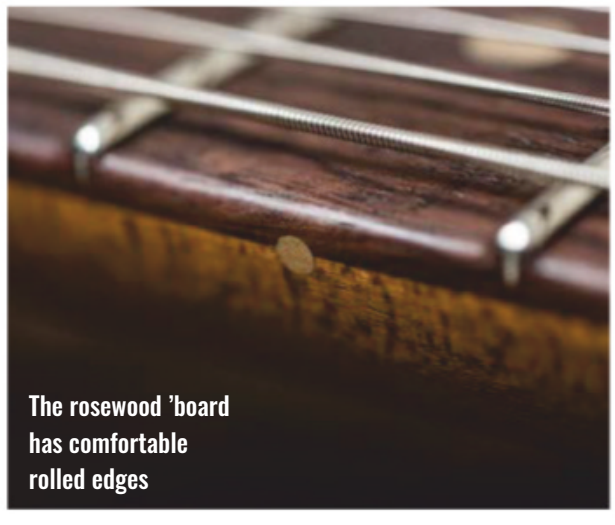
The inevitable result of making an already lightweight guitar even lighter at the body end is that you'll need to choose your strap carefully to help prevent neck dive. Alternatively, simply order a Mirus with a Bigsby to balance things out a little. Regular readers won't be surprised that the second option gets our vote.

The light weight and resonance of the timbers used by Novo help give even the company's solidbody electrics an almost semi-like acoustic tone. Strike a chord when unplugged and the thinline Mirus positively throbs from headstock tip to tail; the shifting harmonics as it sustains are something to behold. It even *smells* good. Let's plug in…

IN USE

Having owned a few old mini-humbucker guitars in the past, we always loved the tones but found that excessive microphony could be a deal-breaker at stage volumes,

The beautifully aged neck feels like an old favourite



The rosewood 'board has comfortable rolled edges

The headstock features a Cat's Eye Burst paintjob to match the body

even with moderate gain. Jason Lollar's take on the mini-humbucker theme avoids squeal by wax-potting the coils but happily, plenty of upper-harmonic interest is still retained.

With stated DC resistance levels of 7.2k (bridge) and 6.6k (neck), we're definitely still in vintage rather than hot-rod territory. The Mirus J's acoustic air and resonance working in unison with the clarity of mini 'buckers is a golden combination and there's touch-response here in spades.

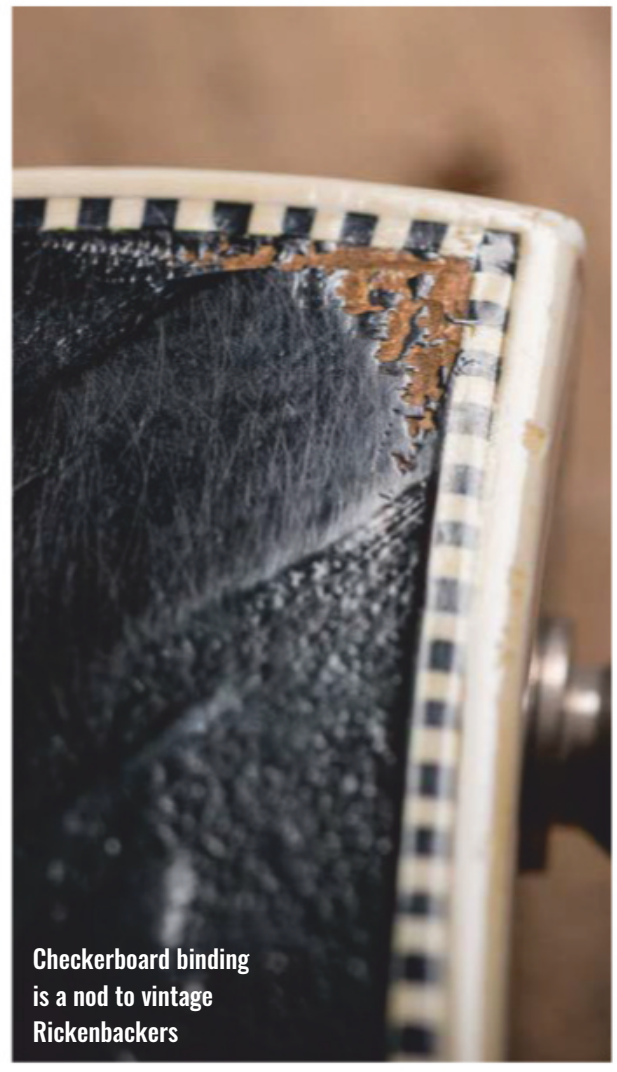
Before we even think about navigating away from the neck pickup, with a small US-voiced valve combo on the point of breakup you can explore sparkling clean voices by playing softly with fingers, dig harder for gritty blues or attack the strings near the bridge with a pick for nasal lead tones evocative of the early Stones singles.

Flip to the middle position and the tone hollows out in a jangle-friendly manner. This is where you get your Beatles and Petty-type tones with a little Gretsch and Rickenbacker in their DNA, but it's equally good for soulful funk and those Meters or James Brown moments.

In contrast, the bridge pickup is like a Telecaster that's had too many Smarties – it's tight, punchy and wiry without sounding thin or scratchy and it will provide a killer platform for power-pop rhythms and muscular country twang. It's seriously versatile and impressive.

Although plenty of 'boutique' builders have jumped on the bandwagon, Dennis Fano is still in the driving seat. The design elements he borrows from the past hang together with a cohesive elegance that's rarely seen elsewhere and, most importantly, his instruments sound and feel every bit as spectacular as they look. **G**

9/10 **Another virtuoso creation from one of the world's leading electric-guitar designers**



Checkerboard binding is a nod to vintage Rickenbackers

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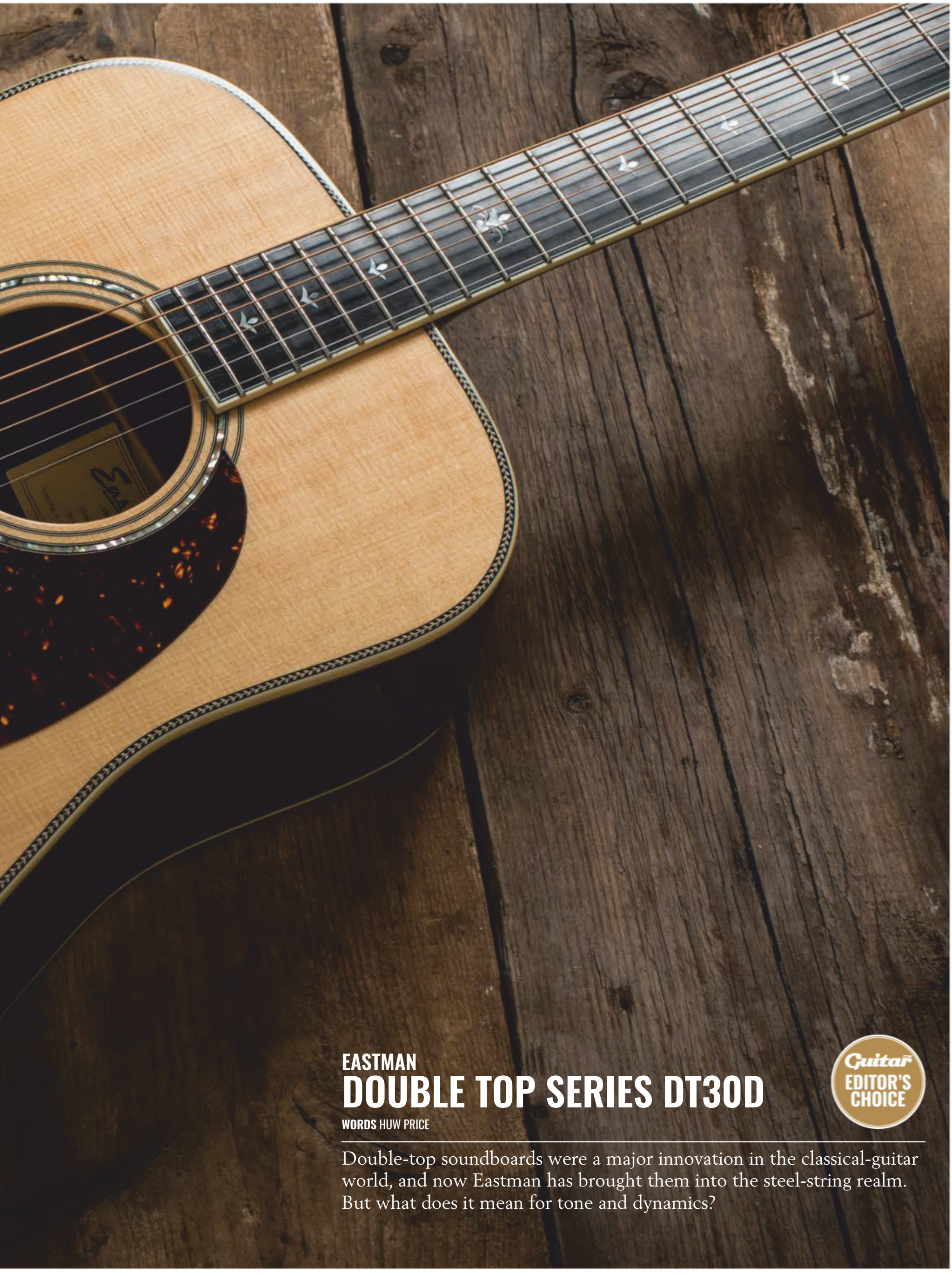


EASTMAN
DOUBLE TOP SERIES DT30D

WORDS HUW PRICE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Double-top soundboards were a major innovation in the classical-guitar world, and now Eastman has brought them into the steel-string realm. But what does it mean for tone and dynamics?

The guitar's back and sides are built from solid rosewood

Herringbone purfling surrounds the composite top

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,199 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Acoustic 6-string guitar. Made in China
BUILD Sitka spruce/Nomex composite top with solid rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck, ebony bridge, pins and fingerboard, rosewood peghead overlay. 14th-fret neck join, Gotoh SX510 open-gear tuners, bone nut and compensated saddle, herringbone purfling, multi-ply body, fingerboard and headstock binding, abalone rosette, pearl fretboard and headstock inlays, dual-action truss-rod
SCALE LENGTH 645mm/25.4"
NECK WIDTH 44mm at nut, 54.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.5mm at first fret, 22.5mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 36.9mm at nut, 55.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.1kg/4.6lb
ELECTRONICS N/A
LEFT HANDERS Yes
FINISH Nitrocellulose gloss
CONTACT eastmanguitars.com

Eastman introduced its new Double Top acoustics at the 2019 Winter NAMM Show. The models in the series, which include the DT30OM, DT30GACE and our review guitar, the DT30D – look like traditional flat-top steel-string acoustics from the outside, but there's something different going on under the surface.

'Double top' has long been the accepted term for the style of soundboard used for this series. The DT30D's soundboard is a three-layer construction, but it's certainly not plywood. Instead, we have two very thin layers of Sitka spruce sandwiching a Nomex 'honeycomb' core. The idea is to achieve a far higher strength-to-weight ratio than is possible with a single spruce layer – Eastman claims that its double tops are 30 per cent lighter than conventional tops.

The concept comes from the classical-guitar world and was introduced during the 1980s by German luthier Matthias Dammann. DuPont developed Nomex as a lightweight, flame-resistant material for the aviation industry and honeycombed sheets are used by luthiers. Latterly, steel-string acoustic builders have begun to use double tops, too.

In all other regards, the DT30D is a conventionally styled and constructed dreadnought. A solid East Indian rosewood back and sides combine with a glued one-piece mahogany neck and an ebony belly bridge with matching pins. Although the headstock veneer is rosewood, the fingerboard is ebony and both feature three-ply binding.

Herringbone purfling surrounds the top and an abalone rosette complements the intricate fingerboard and headstock inlays. In keeping with the classic appointments, bone is used for the nut and compensated saddle and there's a set of gold-plated Gotoh SX510 open-geared tuners.

The neck has a traditional feel, too, combining a full and rounded profile with comfortably soft shoulders. Like the fretwork, the gloss nitrocellulose has been finished to a very high standard and we particularly like the way the finish is shaded on the headstock and heel to transition into the darker rosewood.

IN USE

Everything about the DT30D's appearance suggests a high-end dreadnought in the vintage Martin style, but the similarities are

The soundhole rosette is inlayed with abalone

more visual than sonic. Given Eastman's radically different approach to soundboard construction, this is probably to be expected, but the DT30D is no 'boom and bust' dreadnought with heavily scooped mids, thumping bass and percussive treble.

Instead, we hear something smoother, far more balanced and, dare we say it, refined. Addressing the frequency extremes first, the bass is solid, but it doesn't produce the chest-filling thump that most associate with dreadnought tone. At the treble end, there's no trace of the metallic ping and brashness that so often accompanies fresh spruce and rosewood constructions.

In contrast, the treble combines airiness with plenty of substance and an enjoyably lively transient response. There is a slight sense of tightness to the low mids and bass, and in normal circumstances we'd speculate on how the guitar's tone might develop as it ages and gets played in. With the DT30D, however, it's harder to make predictions, due to our unfamiliarity with this type of soundboard.

DOUBLE TAKE

We talk to Eastman's global product manager for the guitars and mandolin division, Pepijn 't Hart, to get the inside story on the company's new acoustics...

Why did you investigate double-top construction for steel-string acoustics?
"There's always a lot of thinking about classic guitars, but we also try to think ahead. Just like Taylor released their V-Class bracing, we have been working on finding our own sweet spot. With acoustics, it's so difficult to do anything remotely original, after all a D-28 is a pretty good dreadnought. So one thing we do is try to recreate something, but add a flavour that makes you feel as if you're playing a vintage instrument.

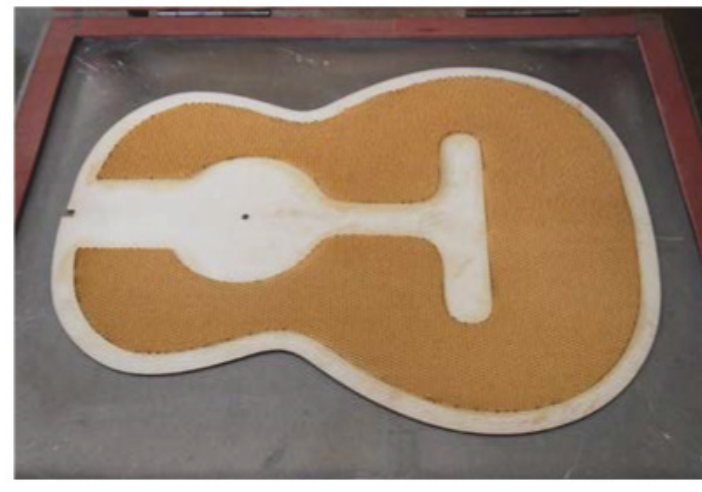
"But at the same time, we work with various luthiers and designers to develop more modern stuff that's at the other end of the spectrum. With the Double Top, both our CEO and founder Qian Ni and Kehua, who is head of the guitar and mandolin workshops, met and talked with a luthier who is well known for making double-top classical guitars. As a result of that, they became very interested in trying double tops with steel-string acoustics.

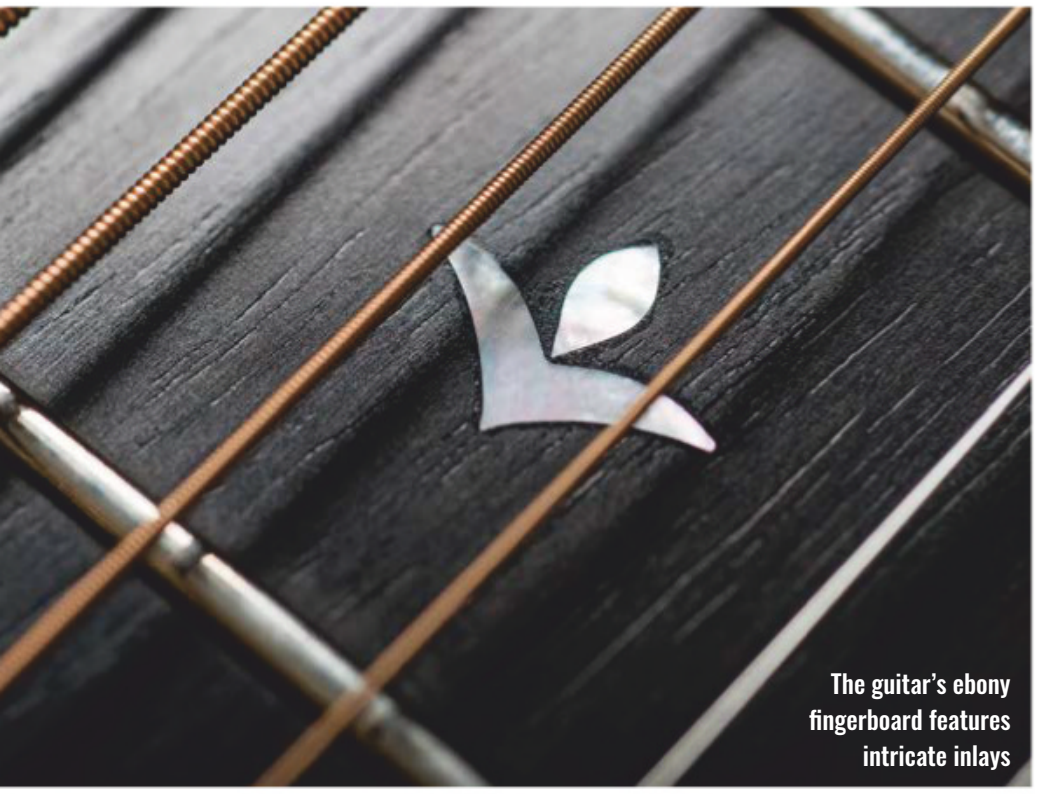
"They made a double-top guitar that was visually indistinguishable from one of our production dreadnoughts and sat me down to play them. It really freaked me out how much difference there was. An Adirondack-topped dreadnought is a wonderful instrument, but it felt like if I put 10 per cent more playing energy into the Double Top, it gave me 20 per cent back. It just amplifies the sound."

Has the double-top method had to be adapted for steel strings?
"It's more or less the same. We did a lot of try outs with scalloped bracing and forward-shifted bracing, but in the end everything we do on our regular guitars worked just as well with the Double Top. It's never better or worse, just different. It adds another flavour and that's what we wanted from the Double Top. We want to see where the boundaries are and be on the lookout for what is our signature sound.

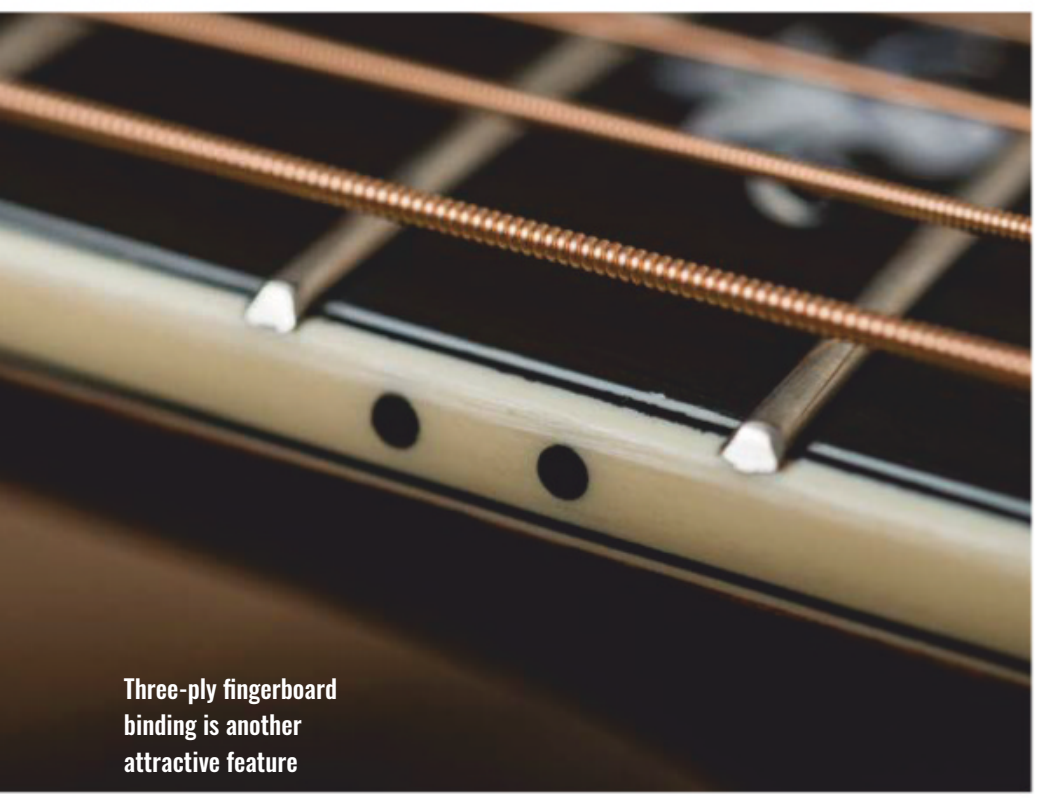
"I think this series is perfect when it comes to frequencies, with an even balance from low to high. Some people may not like it, because they want more personality, and we have that with our other guitars, but the Double Tops give you the full spectrum and fingerpickers will love them because they really sing."

Are the Double Tops more vulnerable to damage?
"I think the Nomex provides the magic here, because the two spruce layers are like veneers in thickness, but when the three layers are pressed and glued together, it all becomes really strong. Somebody in the workshop said a person could stand on a Double Top, but so far I've been afraid to try it. The irony is that even though we don't use machines in the factory, we're now using space-age materials."





The guitar's ebony fingerboard features intricate inlays



Three-ply fingerboard binding is another attractive feature

The headstock veneer is rosewood and the tuners are Gotoh open-gears

It doesn't sound especially like a guitar with scalloped braces, as specified on Eastman's website – peeking inside with an inspection mirror reveals unscalloped X braces with very light scalloping on the tonebars behind the bridge plate. We're told that the review guitar is a prototype and that production models will feature scalloped bracing.

Beginning with some bluegrass flatpicking, we notice that the transient response is a little slower in the bass end. Low notes are certainly clear enough, but they don't quite pop off the board like the high strings. If you like to hear a bit of twang and snap off the wound strings, this may be an issue. But if you prefer a thicker thump, with less front-end attack, it's a feature you're really going to like about this instrument.

For rhythm duties, the DT30D certainly isn't the loudest and most powerful dreadnought we've encountered, but the even string-to-string balance, absence of boom and overall good behaviour make this a fun guitar to play. We would also expect it to lend itself well to recording – and in this regard, we're reminded of the slope-shouldered Taylor Grand Pacific models we reviewed recently. Admittedly, it is a tiny sample group, but perhaps this is an indication of where contemporary acoustic-guitar voicing is headed.

While some may feel that the DT30D isn't the most exuberant dreadnought from a 'strictly rhythm' perspective, its tonal and dynamic characteristics make it far better suited to fingerpicking than most guitars of its type. Here's where the DT30D demonstrates its optimal focus, clarity and touch response. There's almost otherworldly sustain and dizzyingly high headroom.

As fingerpicking acoustics go, it's also remarkably easy and forgiving to play. With a string spread at the bridge of almost 56mm, there's plenty of space so your fingers don't get too bunched up and you can get under the strings to make them pop in a Bert Jansch sort of way. As reviewed, the action is set for rhythm work, but there's sufficient saddle height above the bridge for the strings to be lowered, quite substantially, if preferred.

Although Eastman isn't the first company to make double-top steel-string acoustics, it may well be the first of the large-scale manufacturers to do so. Like Taylor's V-Class bracing, a double top doesn't necessarily reinvent the wheel, but it does offer something that bit different, and we think it provides sonic characteristics that will suit a lot of players. With the technology so stealthily concealed within such a traditional and beautifully made instrument, it's a win-win.

9/10 **Stealth innovation meets classic looks on a guitar that's enjoyably different**

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MARSHALL
STUDIO SERIES SV20H & SC20C

WORDS HUW PRICE

The Studio Series is all about authentic high-power Marshall tone without the earaches. We check out the Plexi-style head and JCM800-inspired combo…

Marshall is synonymous with loud rock amps. But these days, even on an outdoor festival stage, you'll be lucky to get away with cranking up a 50- or 100-watt stack. Happily, this fact isn't lost on the British amplifier brand and the Studio Series is the company's attempt to recreate its legendary tones of the past in more compact, lower-wattage head and combo formats.

Is it actually possible to emulate the classic Marshall roar without window-rattling volumes? The UK-built Studio Series models certainly look confidence-inspiring. With 20 watts of EL34 power switchable down to five watts, the Studio Vintage SV20 and Studio Classic SC20 are both available in head and 1x10 combo formats.

We have our hands on the Studio Vintage SV20H head and Studio Classic SC20C combo, designed to deliver Super Lead and JCM800 tones respectively. Both amplifiers feature PCB construction with exhaustive speaker-output options, a DI output and a bypassable effects loop. Onboard valve line-ups for the pair include ECC83s for preamp and phase-splitting duties and the aforementioned EL34s.

The two-channel, non-master volume SV20H head is based on the Marshall 1959 model – better known as the 100-watt Super Lead or 'Plexi,' due to the original's Plexiglas front panel. We'll be testing it through the matching vertical, closed-back Marshall Studio Vintage SV212 2x12 speaker cab (£599), which comes loaded with a pair of 12-inch Celestion V-Type speakers.

The styling is certainly classic enough, with gold piping, a Plexi-style control panel, old-school metal switches and vintage-style knobs. The two channels are designated 'high treble' and 'normal,' and each has a high and low instrument input.

The compact SC20C combo features a single 10-inch Celestion V-Type speaker and is based on the JCM800 2203 circuit so beloved of heavy rockers. The styling reflects this famous lineage, with black speaker cloth and chunky black-and-red moulded-plastic switches.

Although they look different, the standby switches on both of these amplifiers work in the same way. The centre position puts the circuit in standby mode, while switching upwards sets power at five watts, and switching downwards selects the 20-watt mode.

The JCM800-style Studio Classic's control panel features preamp and master volumes

Both units are extremely well finished, with immaculate Tolex coverings and very neat piping.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH BEING PLEXI?

Traditionally on an amplifier such as this, input one is high-sensitivity and input two is low-sensitivity. Never before have we found using an amplifier's 'low' inputs preferable to using its 'high' inputs, but there's a first time for everything.

It's only after a considerable amount of time spent struggling with the SV20H's tone and presence controls that we even consider plugging into the low input, but the relief is considerable, because it reveals that there is a pedigree Marshall lurking inside. And linking or 'jumping' the channels is the key to unleashing its full potential, but more on that later.

Plugging into the high treble channel's input one alone, the SV20H proves to be probably the brightest-sounding amp we have ever encountered. Unpotted vintage-style P-90s and PAFs begin squealing before you can even play a note and our vintage Stratocaster – which is by no means a bright-sounding example – induces more aural pain than pleasure.

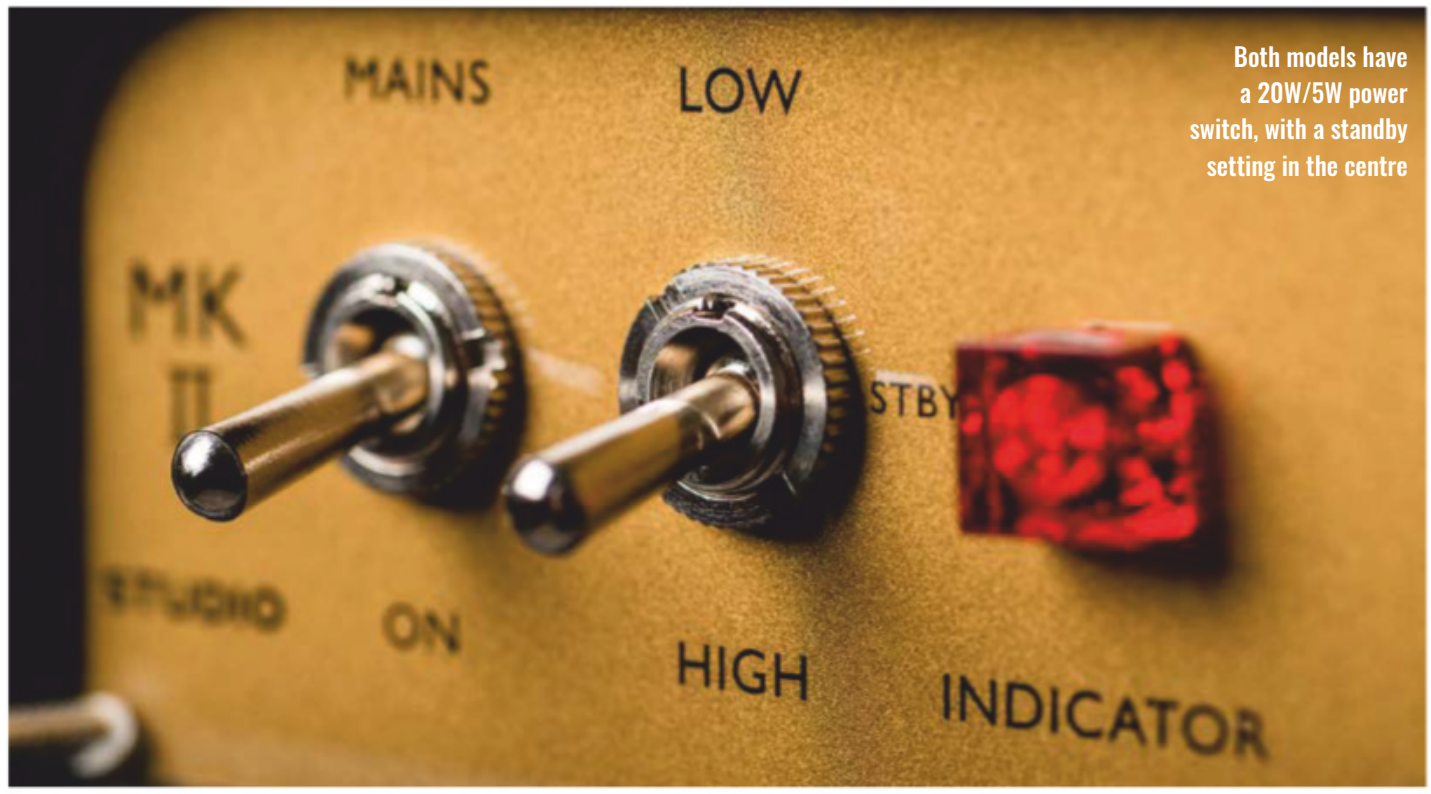
Moving to the 'low sensitivity' input two allows us to push the treble and presence controls beyond nine o'clock and everything begins to make sense. Now we discover the full throated and crystalline cleans, and thick classic-rock overdrive, that are so uniquely Marshall in sound and spirit.

There are various reasons why players began linking the channels on classic Marshalls, but we've often found it necessary when neither channel quite cuts it individually. That's certainly not the case when using input two on the SV20H's high treble channel, but both normal channel inputs sound rather dark unless the treble and presence controls are set near the top of their ranges.

There's much to like about the normal channel's scale and fullness of tone, but even with single coils there's a lack of cut in the upper mids. The solution is to plug your guitar into the normal channel's high input and connect a patch cable between its low input and either input of the high treble channel. Now, when the loudness 1 control is turned up, a crunchy upper midrange enhances the normal channel's smooth and weighty overdrive character and makes up for any shortcomings.

In this full-frequency mode, we can tap into the SV20H's potential. With both channels engaged, the individual loudness controls allow you to balance the low and upper midrange and focus overdrive on specific frequency areas.

With a wider frequency spread to bite into, the equalisation controls also exert a massive influence. The controls are interactive, too, and much depends on the loudness settings. For instance, turning up high treble loudness 1 boosts midrange as well as volume and the middle control can provide scoop for a more contemporary heavy-rock tone. At lower levels, however, lifting the midrange sounds more like a treble boost.



Both models have a 20W/5W power switch, with a standby setting in the centre

The SV20H's two channels and four inputs provide a lot of tonal options

Overall, we prefer blending the normal channel with the classic crunch of the high treble side's low-level input, but others may prefer the grainier and grittier character that comes from the high-level input.

After exploring the SV20H's extremes, we find ourselves setting it up for general-purpose overdrive and using pedals for extra sustain and level when soloing. For cleaner tones, the SV20H responds superbly when guitar volume is dialled back. Once it's dialled in, the SV20H becomes a simple and effective vintage-rock tone machine.

800 MILES

Turning our attention to the Studio Classic SC20C combo, everything feels familiar and straightforward once again. The high and low inputs behave as expected – albeit with a significant difference in level between them – and there is no necessity to go to extremes with any of the equalisation controls in order to dial in a usable tone.

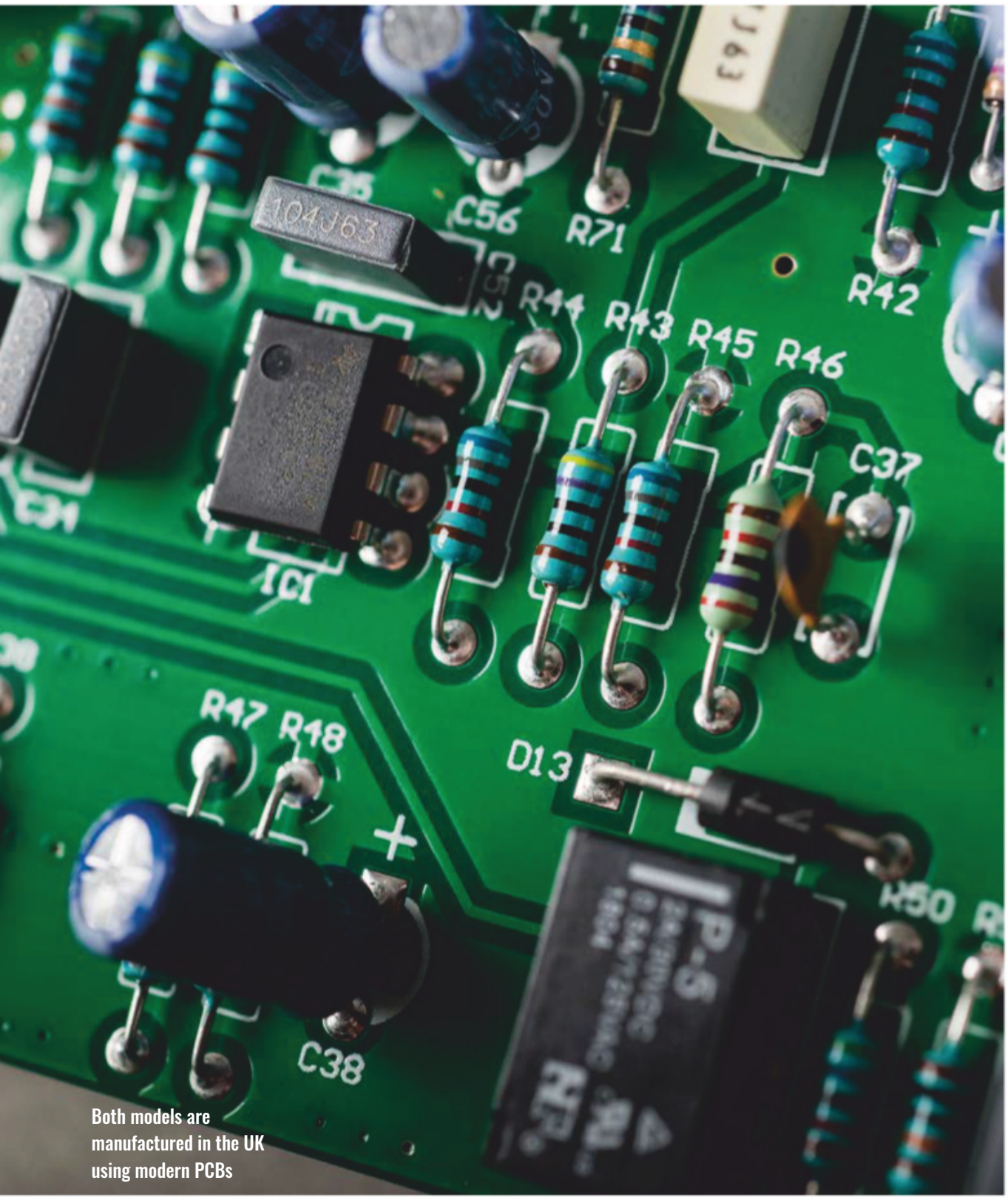
Predictably, the SC20C produces loads more preamp distortion than the SV20H – if that's what you want. However, that's not necessarily what it's all about. Plug into the low input and you have to run the preamp and master volume controls near maximum before you can discern any breakup with single coils.

Even then, it's more of a warm harmonic enhancement than overdrive per se, and it certainly enhances the SC20C's full and loud clean tone. With such powerful and wide-ranging equalisation controls, this amp can deliver big and bold cleans with any type of guitar. It may lack the Studio Vintage's crystal grittiness, but it's smoother and more refined.

Since this is Marshall's attempt at a low-power JCM800, no doubt most of you will be waiting impatiently for us to dish the dirt. As expected, the SC20C generates more than enough saturation for the vast majority of playing styles – metal included. We are impressed by the absence of fizz, and the crunch and sustain are quintessentially Marshall in style. Again, we notice that the preamp volume control significantly boosts

Linking channels unlocks the SV20H's best tones

A Celestion G10 resides in the combo, with 12-inch speakers in the vertical cab



Both models are manufactured in the UK using modern PCBs

Each amp is of course powered by a pair of EL34s

KEY FEATURES

MARSHALL STUDIO VINTAGE SV20H
PRICE £875
DESCRIPTION 2-channel valve combo with onboard power switching. Built in the UK
POWER RATING 20W/5W
VALVES 3x ECC83, 2x EL34
CONTROL PANEL 20W/standby/5W, presence, bass, middle, treble, loudness I, loudness II
REAR PANEL 5x 1/4-inch speaker outputs, selectable 16/8/4-ohm load, FX loop send/return with on/off switch, DI out
SPEAKER N/A
DIMENSIONS 500 x 240 x 230mm
WEIGHT 9.25kg/20.4lb
CONTACT Marshall Amplification marshall.com

8/10 **A very convincing low-wattage take on a high-wattage classic**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

VICTORY THE SHERIFF 22 **£815**, ORANGE ROCKER 15 TERROR **£606**, EGNATER REBEL-30 MKII **£690**

midrange as well as gain, and at lower settings the SC20C can sound a little bright and thin. But then again, few would use a JCM800 for mild overdrive tones anyway, so it's hardly an issue.

As with the SV20H, the 5W setting works superbly. Both amps simply get quieter with barely any discernible change in tone. But it's a loud 5W, so you may opt to use an attenuator anyway. The SC20C benefits from having a master volume, but an attenuator may still prove effective because setting the master volume lower tightens up the bass response. In which case, you can opt for 20W mode with the master volume rolled back and use an attenuator to set the level.

Although the medium-sized cabinet and 10-inch speaker may not seem like a recipe for big tones, the SV20C's sound belies its stature. Nevertheless, it's also available as a head, so we decide to try it through the tall 2x12 cab. The difference is marked, with extra volume, huge but tight lows and wide-open clarity. We do notice some fizziness creeping in, but our suspicions fall on the V-Type speakers rather than the circuit.

CRUNCH TIME

The SV20H succeeds in channelling the spirit of a vintage Marshall head in a lower-power format and it delivers big-box Marshall tone at volume levels that are better suited to modern gigging and recording environments. The SV20H feels far less stiff than original 100W Super Lead we owned back in the day, and removing the necessity for ludicrous volume levels simply to sound any good is very welcome indeed.

We can say the same for the SC20C, but it's tempting to forego portability for tone and explore the head and cab route. Obviously, if you don't like Marshall tones, you won't like either amp, but we mean that as a compliment. Conversely, if enjoying the uncompromising sonic belligerence of Bletchley's finest without breaking your back or perforating your eardrums appeals to you, Marshall's Studio Series is exactly what you've been waiting for. G

KEY FEATURES

MARSHALL STUDIO CLASSIC SC20C
PRICE £999
DESCRIPTION 1-channel valve combo with onboard power switching. Built in the UK
POWER RATING 20W/5W
VALVES 3x ECC83, 2x EL34
CONTROL PANEL Presence, bass, middle, treble, master volume, preamp volume, 20W/standby/5W
REAR PANEL 5x ¼-inch speaker outputs, selectable 16/8/4-ohm load, FX loop send/return with on/off switch, DI out
SPEAKER 1x10" 16-ohm Celestion V-Type
DIMENSIONS 510 x 460 x 255mm
WEIGHT 14.55kg/32lb

8/10 **Captures the JCM800 vibe and is even better with a closed-back extension cab**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

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SUPRO

The boost and gain controls might make some of your favourite stompboxes redundant

SUPRO
1812R BLUES KING 12

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Offering boutique tones for a bargain price, could Supro's stylish new combo be a Blues Junior killer?

"I have about £500 to spend, which valve amplifier should I buy?" It's one of the guitar world's most frequently asked questions and the answer has long been simple: the Fender Blues Junior. Portable, decent sounding and giggable (with a sensible drummer), it's easy to see how it became a huge seller.

Yet recently, new title contenders have emerged, sensing the opportunity to knock the Blues Junior off its perch, and NAMM 2019 saw Supro throw its hat into the ring with the Blues King – an affordable 15-watt combo with mid-century stylings and tones that turned heads on the show floor.

Since its 2014 relaunch under the ownership of Long Island's Absara Audio – also parent company to stompbox firm Pigtronix – Supro's renaissance has been heady. With rock royalty such as Lenny Kravitz and Joe Perry onboard, the company's guitar, amp and effects designs reference the past without being shackled to it. This is evidenced by a recent collaboration with stompbox guru Robert Keeley on the pedal-friendly 1970RK amplifier.

The 1812R Blues King is another case in point. The speaker cutout resembles Supro's 1950s Valco-made Spectator and Comet (whose cabinet designs have been echoed in recent times by the likes of Swart), while the simple white piping, textured vinyl and art-deco logo plate have the understated elegance of a modern boutique unit.

Internally, in order to keep the price wallet-friendly, valve bases and components reside on neat modern PCBs, while the 12AX7 preamp and single-ended 6L6

Want raunchy tones at home-friendly volumes? The master volume can deliver

Supro's iconic 'lightning bolt' logo is a timeless classic and looks great on the Blues King's art-deco badge

The rear panel's effects loop increases the Blues King's flexibility

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £599
DESCRIPTION Single-ended 1x12 valve combo with analogue spring reverb, poplar ply cabinet. Assembled in USA
POWER RATING 15 watts
VALVES 1x 12AX7, 1x 6L6
CONTROL PANEL Volume, boost switch, gain switch, treble, mids, bass, reverb, master
REAR PANEL Boost/gain footswitch input, line out, FX send and return
SPEAKER 12" Custom Supro BK12 8-ohm driver
OPTIONS Two-button footswitch (£59.99), dust cover (£29.99)
DIMENSIONS (d x w x h) 190 x 438 x 410mm
WEIGHT 12.6kg/27.8lb
CONTACT JHS
jhs.co.uk suprousa.com

power amp are augmented by a switchable FET-driven boost and cascading FET-driven high-gain mode.

Those boost and high-gain switches can be triggered remotely via an optional two-button footswitch (£59). A master volume, three-band equalisation and an onboard 235mm reverb tank add versatility, and the scope is expanded further by a rear-panel effects loop. Although the solitary speaker output powers the combo's internal Supro-branded 12-inch driver, there's also a rear-panel line out, providing a buffered preamp output should you require it.

The cabinet has been smartly assembled and about the only downside to this grab-and-go design is that, in order to swap out power or preamp tubes safely, you'll have to remove the steel chassis – the valves are orientated horizontally in the void between the chassis and the rear of the cabinet's front panel. Not exactly a quick change if a tube fails at a gig, but on the plus side, when the amplifier is in bits at your feet, its chunky power and output transformers are confidence-inspiring.

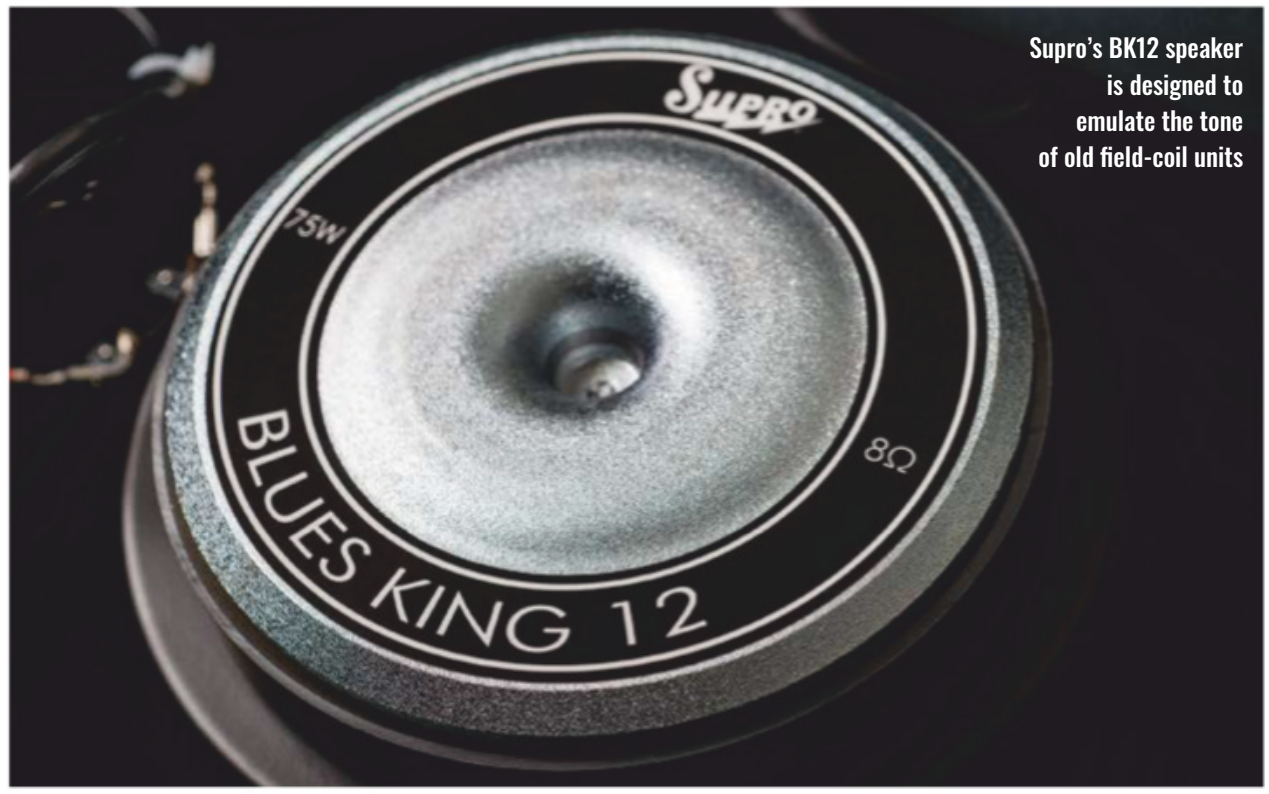
Like many vintage and vintage-style amps, when viewed from the front, the control panel lettering is upside down. Some people find upside-down text hard to read, while for others, it doesn't require a second thought. However, the Blues King isn't exactly a Hughes & Kettner TriAmp, so it shouldn't take long to become accustomed to the locations of the controls.

IN USE

Plugging in and exploring the Blues King's array of sounds with a decent Stratocaster, our first impression is how full-bodied the tones are. With the boost and gain switches disengaged, the key is to push the volume and master controls as hard as the room allows. With the reverb around two o'clock, the EQ set flat and the master and volume at one o'clock, it's a delicious platform for neck-pickup noodling, exhibiting plenty of that dark sparkle that characterises some of our favourite American amplifiers of the 1950s.

If you want to scoop things out and get more of a Blackface sound, then pushing the treble and rolling back the mids will do the trick, although the sensibly voiced tone controls don't take the amplifier's smooth and seductive character away when pushed to extremes.

So far, so impressive. Background noise levels are low, bass response is punchy and the partially open-back cabinet design means you don't need to be standing in the beam



Supro's BK12 speaker is designed to emulate the tone of old field-coil units

Despite the vintage exterior, the Blues King is built around modern PCB architecture

of the amp to hear it properly – there's a satisfying room or stage-filling spread.

In case you think we've been seduced by the sumptuously voiced onboard spring reverb, fear not – even in dry mode, there's plenty of harmonic interest and the good stuff is still there.

The presence of the aforementioned effects send and return means that you can add your own preferred ambience to taste either in front of the amp or in the loop. All that said, life is generally better with spring reverb in it, so we roll the knob back up to around halfway and begin to investigate the boost and gain switches.

Engaging the boost adds a significant chunk of extra volume and smooths things out a little, but rather than simply providing a useful level hike for soloing in a two-guitar band, it also lets you get a little more out of the amp at neighbour-friendly volumes. Try backing off the master and switching on the boost for an experience that's a little more satisfying under the fingers.

With the volume cranked and the boost engaged, proceedings are starting to get a little raunchy, especially when switching from our Strat to an Esquire equipped with a Broadcaster-style bridge pickup. We're firmly in Keef territory now; it's impossible not to tune to open G and enjoy a tweedy mixture of of grit and sparkle that stays clean when you're gentle and growls when you're mean. The master volume works very well indeed here, too, and you can get those enjoyably dynamic tones even when your 'audience' consists of several potted plants and the family cat.

Many of us would be more than happy with an amp that simply covers the ground we've described thus far, but the Blues King has additional levels of dirt to unleash. With the boost disengaged and the gain switch activated, Richards exits stage left as Gibbons and Page take over. It's here you'll find those dense, sizzling overdrive tones that most guitarists hear in their head when they think 'Supro'.

There's still plenty of control available via both the guitar's volume knob and the intensity of your picking-hand attack, but if being in control sounds boring, max out the volume and flip both switches up at the same time. Now Dan Auerbach and Gary Clark Jr are tearing up the building and you're hearing authentic, vintage-style fuzz tones from a small valve combo, and there isn't a pedalboard in sight…

Other than adding a tremolo circuit, it's hard to imagine how the Supro design team could have crammed more into such a compact cabinet. At both stage- and home-friendly volume levels, the Blues King offers a rich palette of Americana tones from vintage cleans to frayed overdrive and explosive fuzz. When you factor its price into the equation, the Blues King is the no-brainer purchase of 2019 so far.

Head-to-head with the Blues Junior, the edgier and more sophisticated-sounding Supro suddenly makes the most popular kid in the playground look a little too clean-cut and, dare we say it, even a little boring. In the affordable valve-amp market, things just got very interesting indeed… G

The single-ended 6L6 power stage is extremely touch-sensitive

10/10 **Expensive-sounding tones in a cool, compact and affordable package**

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FENDER BLUES JUNIOR IV **£599**, BLACKSTAR STUDIO 10 6L6 **£575**, SWART ATOMIC SPACE TONE **£2,099**

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Gibson LPJ (Rubbed Vintage Burst)
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Finished in Sherwood Green Metallic. Dual Texas Special Single Coil Pickups. Grease-bucket Tone Circuit. Includes Gig Bag.

Fender American Performer Telecaster
Humbucking pickup in Neck position & Yosemite Single coil in Bridge. Finished in Aubergine. Includes Padded Gig Bag.

Fender American Performer Telecaster
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Fender American Performer Strat
Alder Body. HSS. Two Yosemite Single Coil Pickups & One Double Tap Humbucker. Finished in Black. Maple Fingerboard. Gig Bag.

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WALRUS AUDIO LILLIAN

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Walrus Audio's new analogue phaser is named after a pilot… and it'll soar and swoop with the best of them

Lillian Yonally was a volunteer pilot for the US Women Airforce Service Pilots during WWII. She did it mainly to help the American war effort but also, we like to imagine, so that one day she might appear on the front of an effects pedal. And here is that pedal – the Lillian, an analogue phaser from the reliably eccentric Walrus Audio.

This pedal is about as far from the classic one-knob MXR Phase 90 format as you can get in a compact stompbox: as well as controls for rate and width, there's a feedback knob for boosting the effect's resonance, another for moving between dry, phasing and wobbly vibrato sounds and a toggle switch for flipping between four-stage and six-stage operation.

IN USE

The Lillian's core sound with everything set to halfway is rich and chewy, but with an overall timbre that's close to the bypass tone – so there's no Small Stone mid-scoop in evidence here. The rate goes from an ethereal meander to a fairly rapid throb and width is easily set for frequency peaks and troughs to be as extreme as you want them.

The other two knobs give more precise control over the density of the effect, from a sweet shimmer to a pulsating whine – and then a flip of the toggle switch enables you to change the colour of the modulation in a way that's subtle but very cool.

Finally, we ought to mention that often-unsung stompbox hero, the footswitch: this is one of those clever soft-switching types which automatically becomes non-latching if you hold your foot down on it – making the Lillian ideal for five-second phasey flourishes.

8/10 **A smart box of swirliness with the emphasis on tonal tweakability**

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £195
DESCRIPTION Analogue phaser pedal. Made in USA
CONTROLS Rate, width, feedback, dry/phase/vibrato, 4/6-stage switch
FEATURES Soft-switching relay bypass with smart momentary (non latching) function; powered by 9-volt mains supply only (not included)
DIMENSIONS 126 x 66 x 56mm
CONTACT Face Distribution
face.be, walrusaudio.com

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EZ81-Retro Cryo	£24.00	6L6GC-Retro Cryo	£24.00
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ECC82	10 Pcs	£7.20 Each	E34L	16 Pcs	£13.50 Each
ECC83-S	10 Pcs	£7.50 Each	EL84	16 Pcs	£7.20 Each
ECC83-S	20 Pcs	£7.20 Each	6L6GC	16 Pcs	£13.20 Each
ECC83-S	40 Pcs	£6.90 Each	6V6GTS	16 Pcs	£12.00 Each
ECC83-MG	10 Pcs	£9.00 Each	5881	16 Pcs	£13.20 Each
ECC83-MG	20 Pcs	£8.76 Each	6550	12 Pcs	£25.20 Each
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	Pro Junior	Blues Junior	Hot Rod Deluxe	Hot Rod Deville
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FUZZROCIOUS
KNOB JAWN

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

The potential for tone-mangling is strong with this boutique digital/analogue octave blender, hand-made in the USA…

Ryan Ratajski of Fuzzrocious pedals has a reputation for high quality, hand-wired sonic mayhem, and NAMM 2019 heralded the arrival of his latest stompbox design – an original take on the octave-pedal theme. There is a palpable sense of relief when our research reveals that the word "jawn" is Philadelphian slang for "an object, person, place or thing," a fact which enables us to adroitly sidestep double entendres and objectively evaluate this massive knob.

Like all Fuzzrocious pedals we've seen, the Knob Jawn runs exclusively from a direct power supply (nine-volt DC 2.1mm centre-negative adaptor) for ecological reasons, and feels sturdy and well made. The layout of the pedal is clear and well labelled with dry:wet and -/+ knobs in the top left- and right-hand corners respectively.

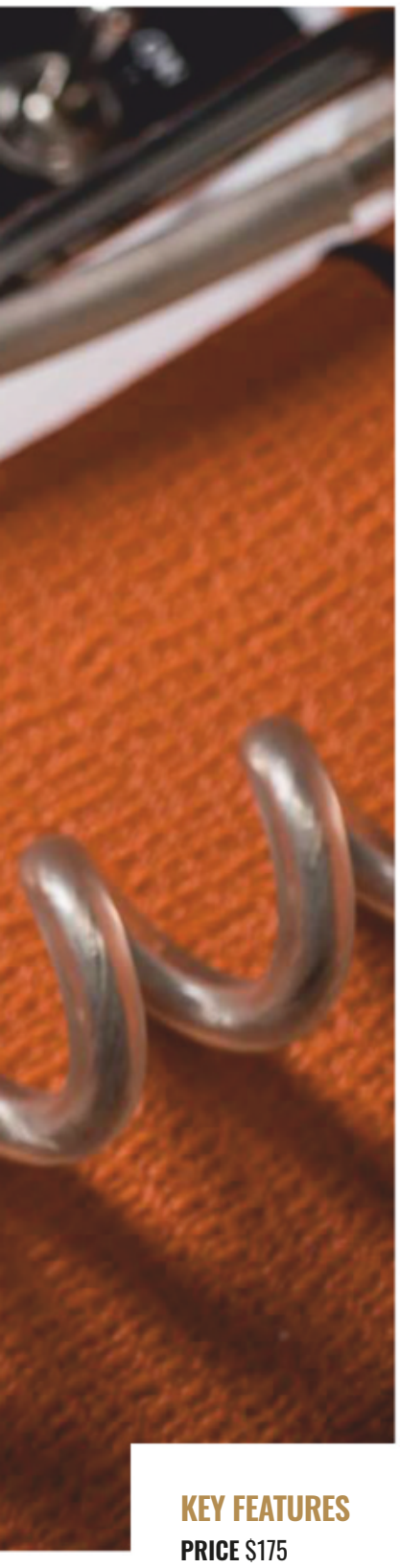
There are two footswitches, a standard on/off toggle and a Momentary switch on the left-hand side, more of which later. The main knob from which the pedal takes its name is a blend control which allows the user to move seamlessly from a full analogue to a full digital signal, and all points in between.

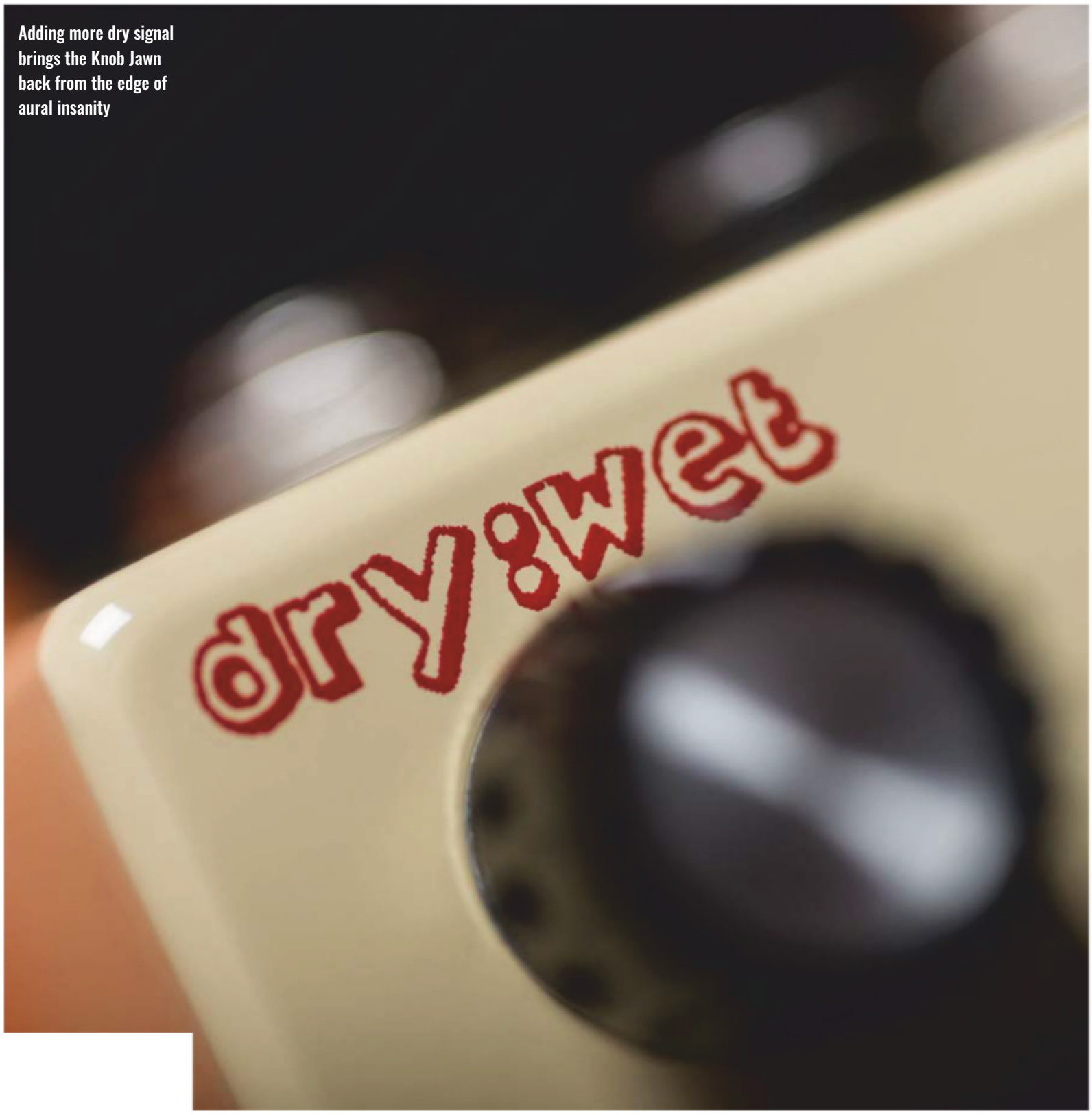
IN USE

With the pedal set 100 per cent wet, we start off with the Knob Jawn's digital voice (knob fully to the right) and experiment with the -/+ control. It should be noted that this blends in either an octave below or an octave above rather than any other notes in between, and our initial experiments reveal a clear octave response (above and below) that tracks vibrato and bends very well. This is a good digital octave sound, but the Knob Jawn is capable of so much more…

Dressing to the left, we unleash myriad wonderful, glitchy textures not unlike those to be found when playing chords through an original Whammy pedal. Vintage Nintendo-style beeps and squeals are there in abundance with the Knob Jawn set to an octave up, and as we blend in a lower octave we discover a rich seam of deep, crunchy lunacy which can be rescued from complete incoherence (should you wish) by adding more dry signal with the dry:wet knob. Going full analogue also adds an invigorating shot of distortion to the mix.

The combination of the dry:wet control and the main analogue/digital knob offers most potential. Even subtle tweaks are capable of engendering new and intriguing textures. Finally, the left-hand footswitch





Adding more dry signal brings the Knob Jawn back from the edge of aural insanity

KEY FEATURES

PRICE $175
DESCRIPTION Analogue/digital octave blend pedal. Made in USA
CONTROLS Dry:wet, -/+ and analogue/digital knobs, on/off footswitch and 'opposite' footswitch
FEATURES Analogue and digital tones, -/+ 1 octave with blend
DIMENSIONS 110 x 40 x 60mm
CONTACT Fuzzrocious
fuzzrocioustpedals.com

unlocks the diametric opposite of the setting currently engaged, immediately opening up further possibilities for ear-bending riffage à la St. Vincent, Jack White and other pioneering timbrenauts.

Not one for the Dumble-hungry blues hound, the Fuzzrocious Knob Jawn will unapologetically ruin your tone in very creative and beautiful ways. **G**

8/10 **An ingenious and creative octave pedal for the quality-minded sonic hooligan**

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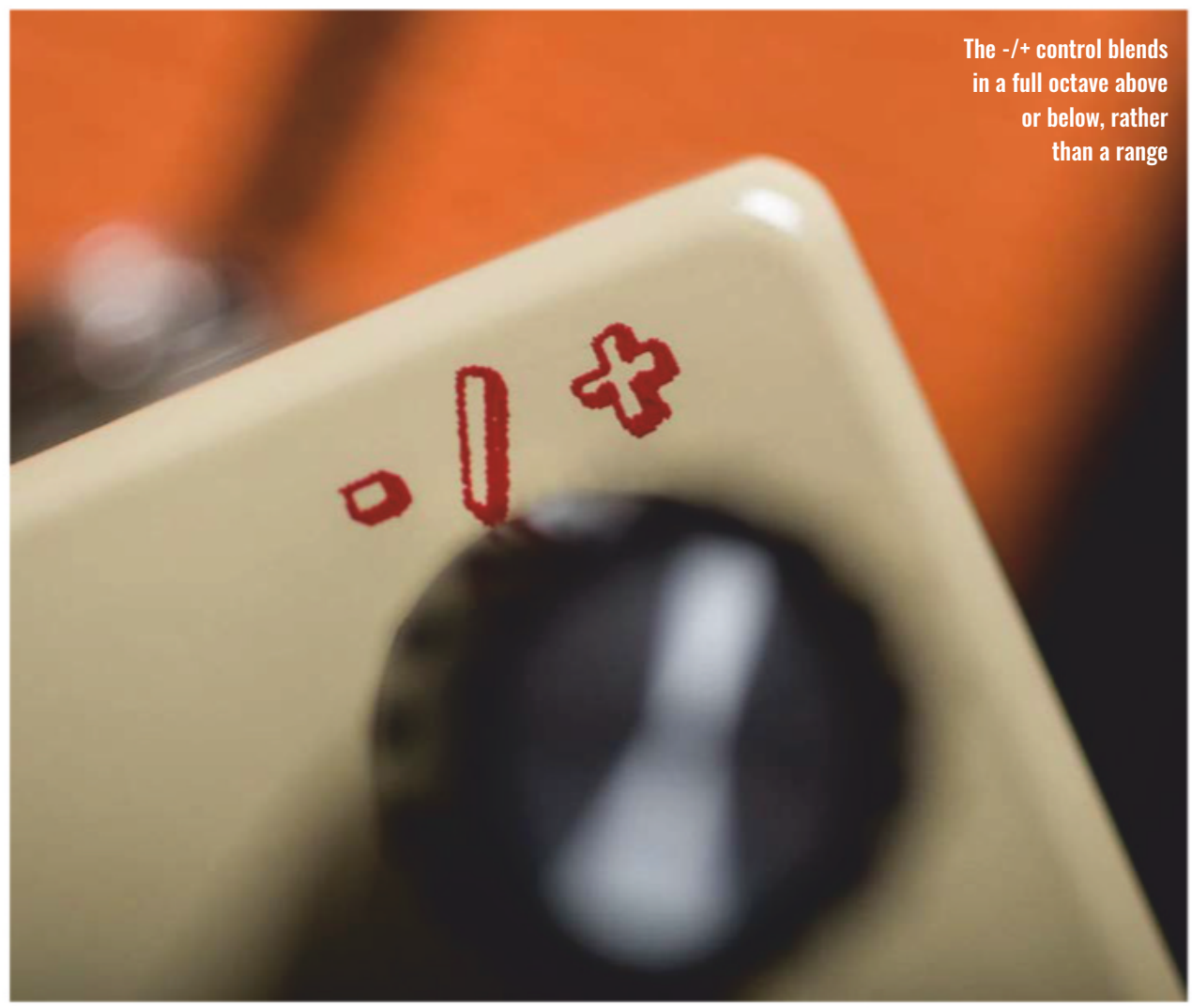

The -/+ control blends in a full octave above or below, rather than a range

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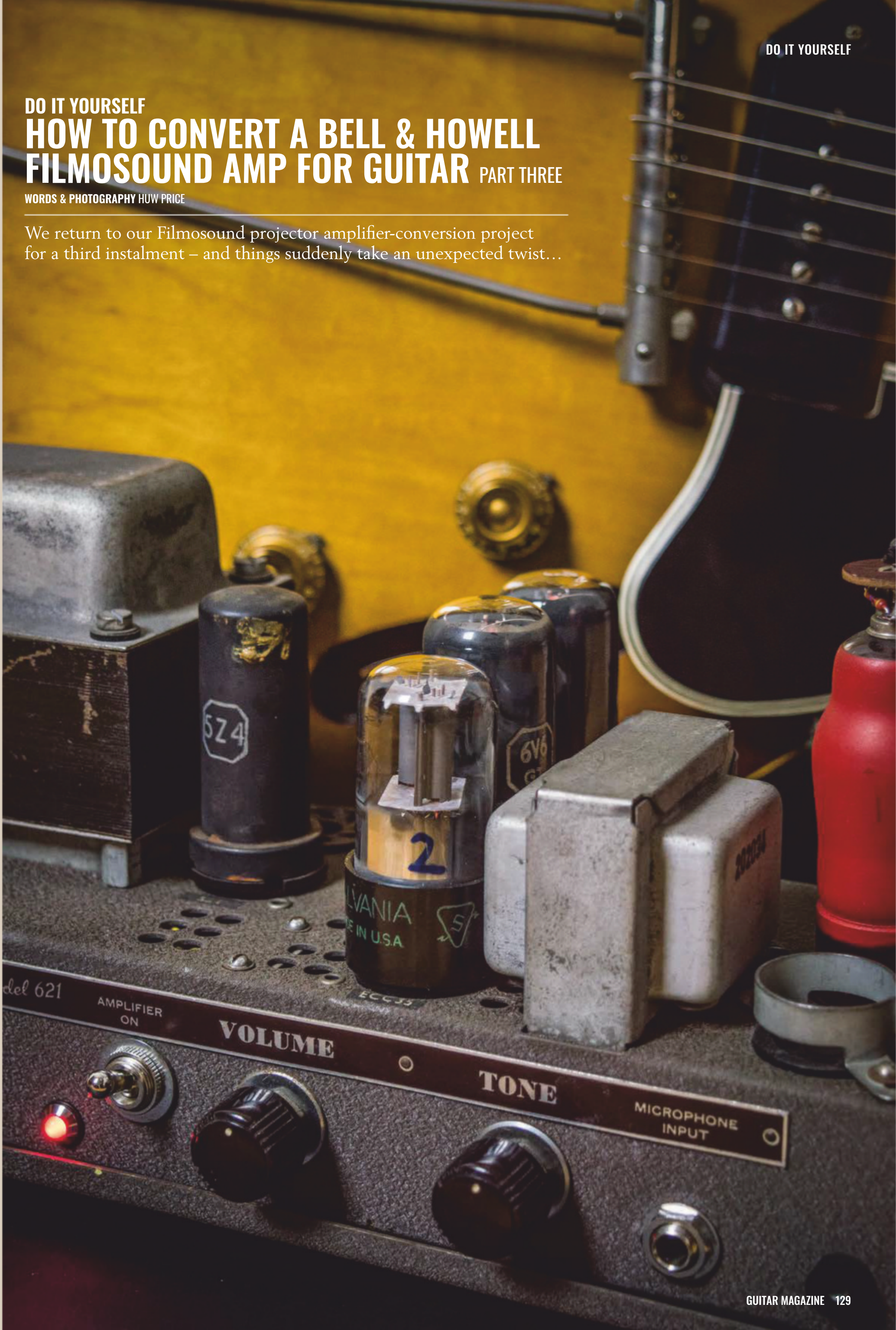
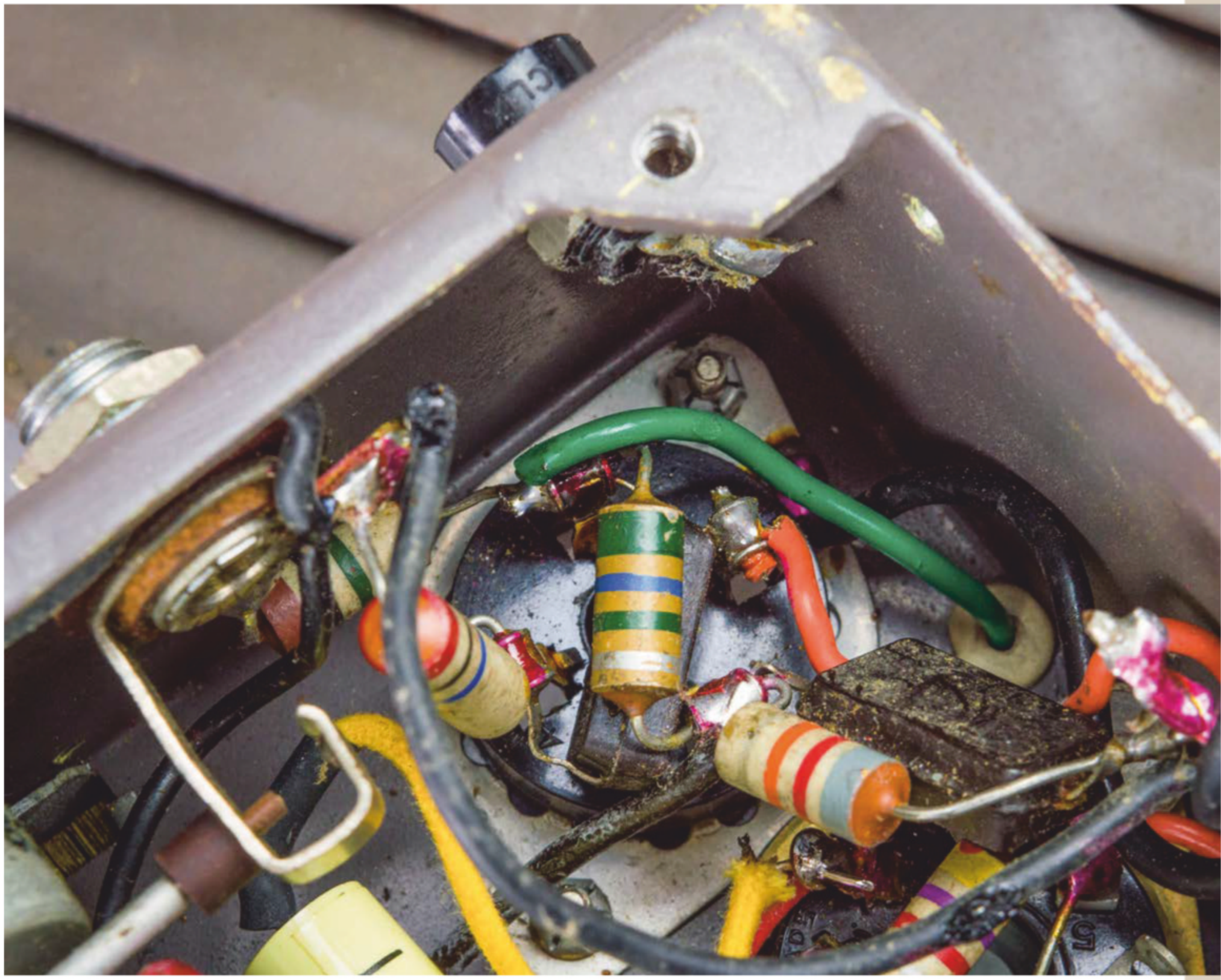
DO IT YOURSELF

HOW TO CONVERT A BELL & HOWELL FILMOSOUND AMP FOR GUITAR PART THREE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

We return to our Filmosound projector amplifier-conversion project for a third instalment – and things suddenly take an unexpected twist…





Last time, I signed off with my Filmosound working and passing signal, but also squealing and producing a lot of unwanted noise. Having done some research, it transpires this is a known issue with Filmosound conversions, because the green signal-carrying grid wire emerges from the chassis and plugs onto the top of the EF37A pentode.

With the amp bolted into a metal projector chassis, the cable would effectively have been shielded. However, the standalone arrangement allows the wire to pick up interference and send it straight down the audio path to be amplified along with the guitar signal.

A couple of weeks prior to getting back into this project, I received an email from Tony Teixeira of Tex Amps asking how the conversion was coming along. I explained the noise issues and he said that I should remove the green wire connected to the EF37A grid and replace it with a shielded cable. He also suggested replacing the 33K resistor on the grid connector with a 47R resistor.

Tony's instructions are followed to the letter, but results are mixed. The amp is still noisy and the squeal sets in at the same volume level as before, but there is a dramatic improvement in sound quality. Before, it sounded clean and a little dull, but now I get my first taste of how the stock Filmosound circuit overdrives and it's pretty exciting.

Still, I notice that the amplifier produces next-to-no noise when the volume control is turned down, so I figure it's time to tidy things up around the input section of the amp.

Checking the schematic, I notice a bunch of peculiar wiring around the jack socket. Since this is, after all, a projector amplifier, I can't claim to understand everything that's going on inside this circuit, but some of the dense cluster of resistors seem to be related to the projector-lamp circuit.

There's also a mechanical linkage going from the tip connector of the input jack to a switch in the oscillator section of the amp. Because that is now redundant, I decide to remove the mechanical parts and all the resistors that appear unnecessary.

I also install a modern amplifier input jack with a switch tag that connects the tip to ground when nothing is plugged in. A 1M resistor is soldered between the tip and sleeve connections in the usual way, with one resistor leg linking the sleeve and switch tags. I can now solder the shielded grid wire directly onto the jack socket and it's time to test the amp again.

SOUNDS ALIVE

What comes next is a bit of a shock – but thankfully, not the potentially fatal electric kind. The Filmosound is impressively quiet until I hit a chord and get one of the most harmonically loaded overdrive tones I've ever heard. It's also very well defined and quite punchy. If this is what Filmosounds are all about, no wonder they're so well regarded – I can understand why some restorers prefer to retain elements of the original circuit.

In contrast to tweeds, the tone control isn't simply a treble roll-off. Things get a bit brighter as it's turned clockwise, but I also hear the bass response shifting – with bass

THE PREMISE BEHIND THIS PROJECT WAS TO FIND OUT IF IT'S POSSIBLE TO GET OUTSTANDING 1950S AMP TONE FOR LESS THAN £200... THE CLEAR AND UNEQUIVOCAL ANSWER IS YES

FACING PAGE Most of these components are not required for guitar-amp purposes and removing them finally solves the noise issue

ABOVE The green wire and 33K grid resistor cause noise problems due to the lack of shielding

LEFT Replacing the grid wire and 33K resistor with shielded cable and a 47R lowers noise and improves tone

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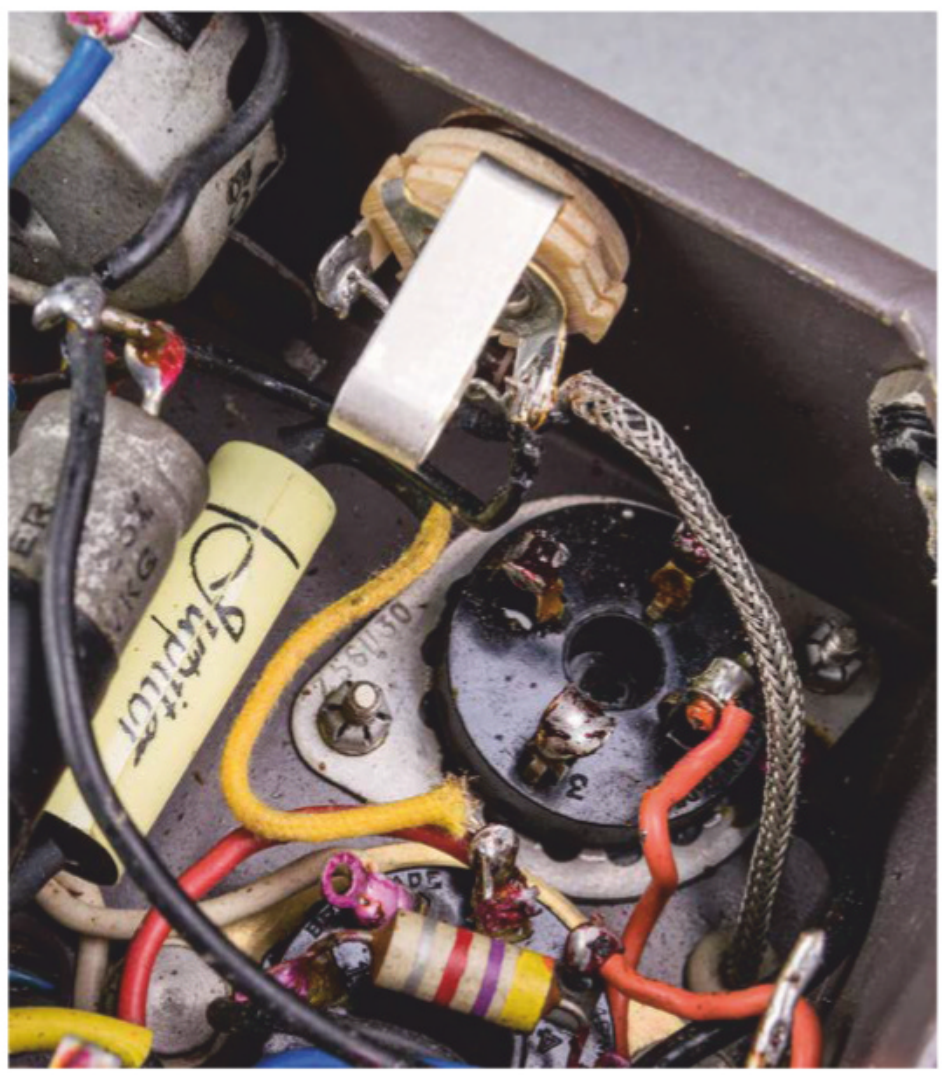
rolling off as things get brighter and the tone getting fatter rather than duller as the tone control is turned anticlockwise. I'd anticipated disappointment with the stock circuit and was resigned to gutting the whole amp and building something from scratch. However, I'm so impressed with what I've heard so far that, rather than rebuild, the plan is now to optimise the existing circuit with some basic maintenance and minor modifications.

TAKING PRECAUTIONS

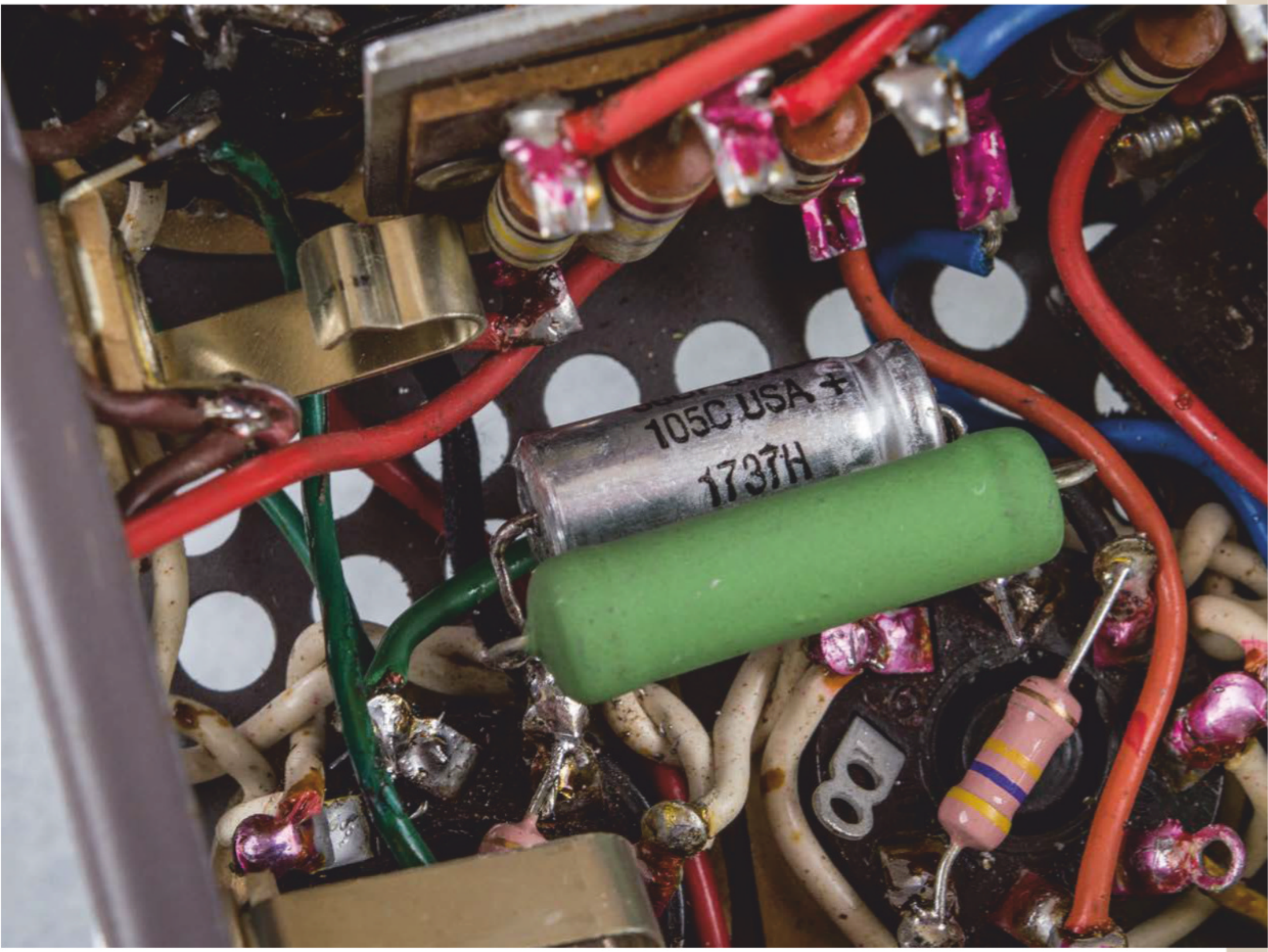
So far, I've been riding my luck, because getting the amp up and running was so easy. But I now need to check that everything is running close to spec. Unlike Fenders, Marshalls and all the other classic amps, tracking down a Filmosound 621 schematic isn't easy. Eventually, I found one here: https://bit.ly/2TJZoDA.

Many of the component values are hard to read, but at least it gives me some voltage test points and I'm able to establish that my amp is in pretty good shape. Even so, there are some things I must do to keep it that way, and



ABOVE The old jack socket has been removed and the superfluous resistors and capacitors wired to the lamp socket are about to come out

LEFT All the components are taken off the lamp socket and the shielded grid wire is soldered to a new muting input jack



swapping out the cathode-bias capacitor on the 6V6s is first on the list.

I decide to leave the existing, and frankly inaccessible, 50uF capacitor in situ and make a slight wiring alteration so a modern replacement can be situated next to the bias resistor. Electrolytic capacitors can leak and drift in value, so it's a sensible precaution. With that done, I can check the bias of the 6V6s.

BIASED VIEW

Although this is a cathode-biased amp, cathode-bias resistors can drift in value and the mains voltages coming out of our wall sockets may differ from the 1950s. Therefore, it's essential to check those valuable power valves are running safely. To measure bias, I use a method based on the resistance of the output transformer's primary windings.

If you look at the schematic for any push-pull amp with two power valves, you'll see that the primary side of the output transformer has three connections – with two going to the valve plates, and the 'centre tap' wire going to the power supply. By measuring the resistance between the centre tap connection and the plate connections, Ohm's law can be used to calculate the current draw and plate dissipation of each valve.

As with all things related to valve electronics, this is potentially dangerous and you need to observe safety protocols. When making multimeter connections, it is absolutely essential that the amp is disconnected from the mains and that all residual voltages within the amp have been drained off.

With the multimeter test probes clipped onto the rectifier tag that connects to the transformer centre tap and the front 6V6's plate (pin 3), I measure resistance between them. I do the same with the other 6V6 and the readings are 240R and 221R. Leaving the test probes in situ, I set the multimeter to read DC voltage and measure the voltage drop across the transformer winding.

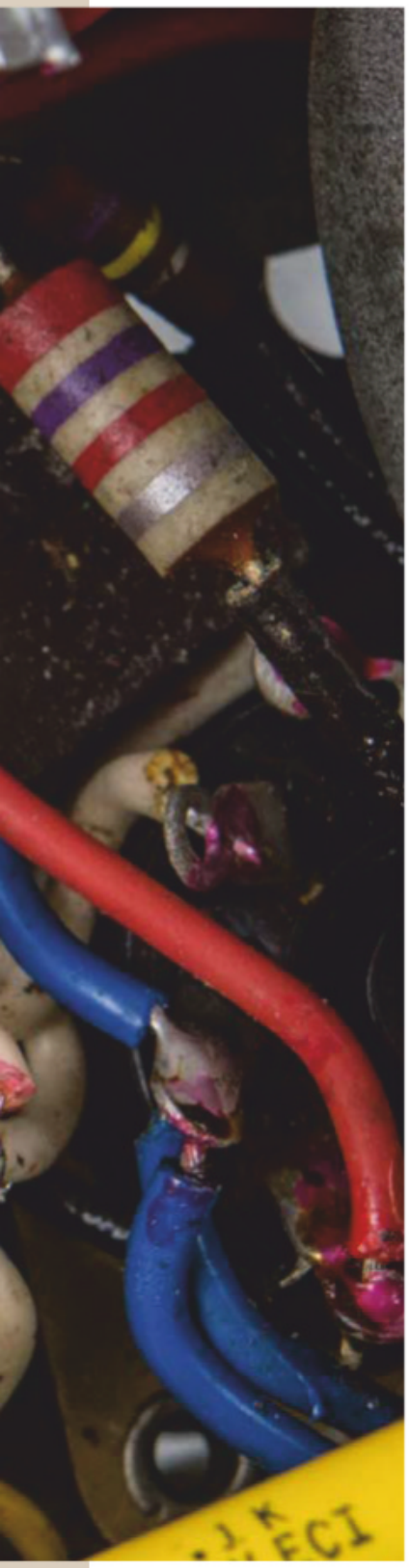
The amp is switched off, voltages are drained and I clip the multimeter probe to the plate of the other 6V6. The amp is switched back on and I now have voltage-drop readings of 10.1V and 9V. Since current (I) equals voltage (V) divided by resistance (R), I can deduce that the front and rear 6V6s are drawing 42mA and 40.7mA respectively.

After switching off and draining again, I clip one test probe to chassis ground and leave the other on the valve plate to measure plate voltage. I do the same for the other valve and get 343V on each. Multiplying the plate voltages by the current reading in milliamps gives me plate-dissipation results of 14.4W and 13.9W with the stock 250R cathode-bias resistor.

For cathode-biased 6V6, I'm shooting for 12 watts, or just below, so the 6V6s are running way too hot. After a bit of experimentation, I settle on a 340R cathode resistor. This gives me a plate voltage of 352.5 and voltage drops of 8.2V and 7.2V. Crunching the numbers, I get plate dissipation readings of 12W and 11.5W, and I'm calling that 'close enough for jazz'.

ZONE ON TONE

The tone circuit is connected to the first cathode of the ECC35 double triode as well as



FACING PAGE The original cathode-bias capacitor is disconnected from the 6V6 sockets and a new one is soldered across the sockets in parallel with a 330R resistor

ABOVE These two yellow capacitors replace the originals and the tone control's functionality improves dramatically

LEFT This yellow 120pF capacitor wired across the volume control extends the Filmosound's upper-frequency response at lower volume settings

the negative-feedback loop. I had anticipated disconnecting the negative feedback to liven things up, but that renders the tone control inoperative and without negative feedback, the Filmosound sounds a bit overcooked.

Even so, I suspect the control range is somewhat restricted. Knowing how capacitor values tend to drift over the decades, I decide to swap out the tone-circuit capacitors to be sure everything is operating as intended. This greatly improves the tone control's functionality and I hear a very clear treble boost/bass rolloff at one extreme, with treble cut and bass boost at the other. In contrast to early Fender tweeds with lone tone controls, the Filmosound control's default position is around the centre rather than near maximum.

At lower volume settings, I still feel I'm missing some sparkle frequencies and I have a simple solution for that. I'm a big fan of treble-bleed capacitors, because they allow you to extend an amp's upper-frequency response in a non-intrusive and completely reversible way. Fender used them in several amp models, often with an accompanying bright switch.

Bright capacitor values can range from 50pF to 500pF and they are wired across the input and output tags of the volume potentiometer. The smaller the capacitor, the higher and narrower the frequency range. Larger caps will extend the 'treble bleed' down to the upper mids and midrange. When the volume control is turned down, high frequencies can 'jump' across the pot unhindered and this keeps everything bright and clear.

When the volume control is turned up, the resistance between the pot's input and output drops, so the cap's influence decreases. At maximum volume, the cap has no effect at all. I use silver mica capacitors for this application and it's fun to experiment to find the value that works best for your pickups and sonic tastes. For this Filmosound, I go with 120pF. All that's left is to drill a hole in the front of the chassis, near the power switch, where I just about manage to squeeze in a pilot light.

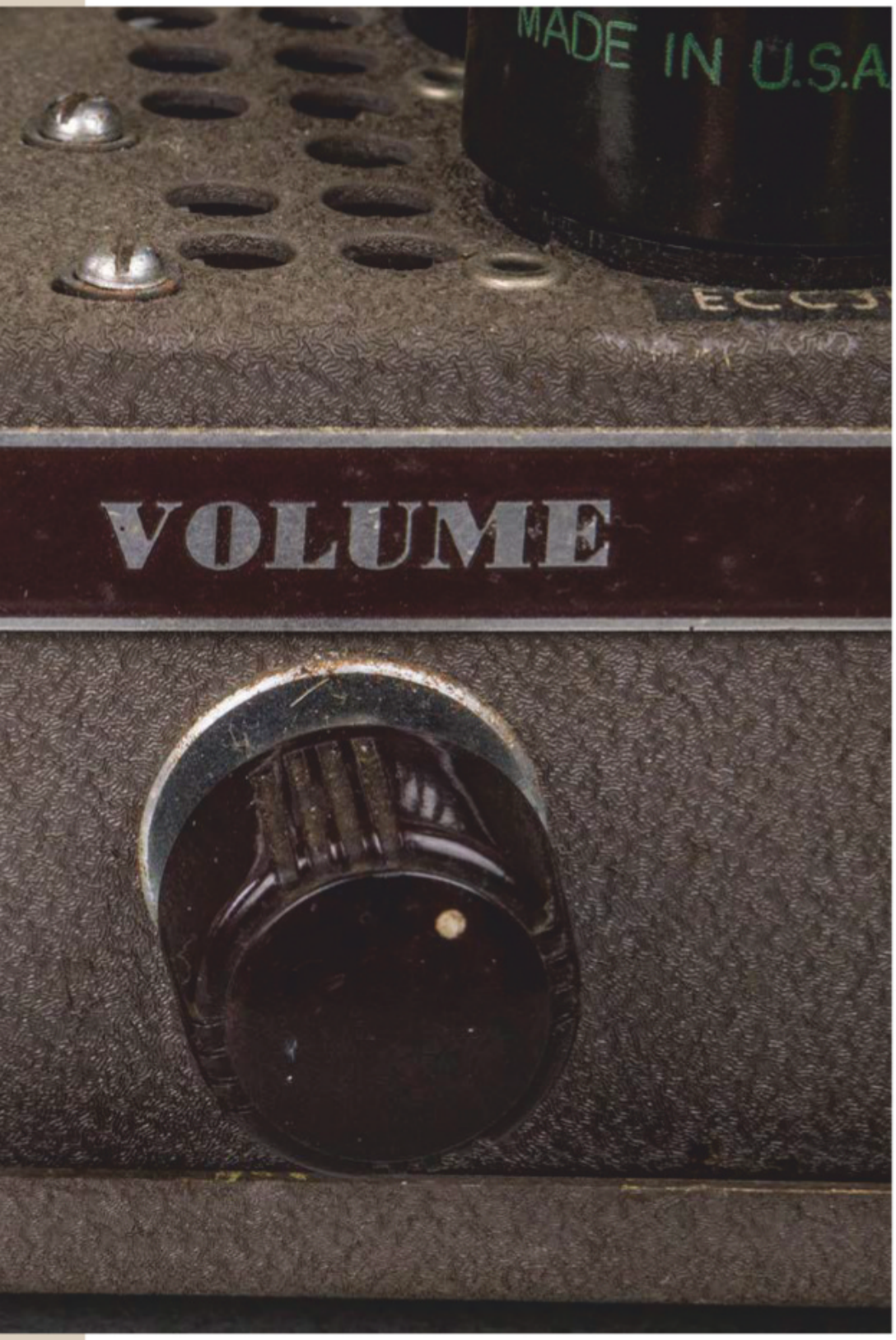
FILMOSOUNDS GOOD

You may be wondering why I haven't replaced the multi-section filter capacitor in the power supply – given that I invariably advise doing so with vintage amps. Well, firstly the amp runs with no discernible power supply hum, so the capacitors inside the canister are all clearly doing their jobs. Secondly, I am familiar with this brand from Leak hi-fi amps, and my pair of TL/12 Plus monoblocks from 1963 are still running silently with their original filter caps. There's a distinct possibility that I got lucky with this amp because, had it been 'dead on arrival', I certainly wouldn't have relished the prospect of debugging it.

I'm not surprised that most of the techs that work on Filmosounds simply gut the insides, but it's a shame, because the stock circuit sounds so good that none of the mods I had planned now seem worthwhile.

The tone circuit is particularly interesting, because it behaves more like a girth control that can push the low mids or roll off bass to enhance tightness and brightness. In contrast to tweeds, rather than adding gain at its brightest, overdrive increases when the tone control is rolled back to push the lows.

The Filmosound combines the chewy fatness of early 50s Fender tweeds and the extra gain and aggression of late-50s tweeds, with tighter lows and the smoother overdrive of a Gibson GA-40. It always sounds clear and larger than life, and the way overdrive responds to playing dynamics is resolutely old school. I find the clean and edge of breakup



tones this amp produces just as exciting as its proto-metal overdrive. Those professionals who restore and convert these amps stress the quality of the transformers, and I can certainly see why.

Most seem to run Filmosounds with 5Y3 rectifiers, but I prefer the stock 5Z4. It provides a soft startup and the HT is higher. As a result, the amp has livelier dynamics, and a bit more clean headroom and clarity. But be careful, because metal-cased valves can get dangerously hot and the bias-resistor value may need to be changed along with the rectifier if you want to experiment.

The premise behind this project was to find out if it's possible to get outstanding 1950s amp tone for less than £200. The clear and unequivocal answer is yes, and in this case, £180 would be closer to the mark. All that remains is to pick the ideal speaker and decide whether to use the Filmosound as a standalone head, or build a combo cabinet for it. Watch this space, because there's every likelihood you'll be seeing this amp again in the not-too-distant future. G

FACING PAGE There's just enough room inside to squeeze in an LED pilot light

ABOVE With its chrome bezel, the pilot looks the part and we can tell at a glance if the amp is switched on

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Freddie King is an example of a blues player who used turnarounds to add vitality and variety to the 12-bar format

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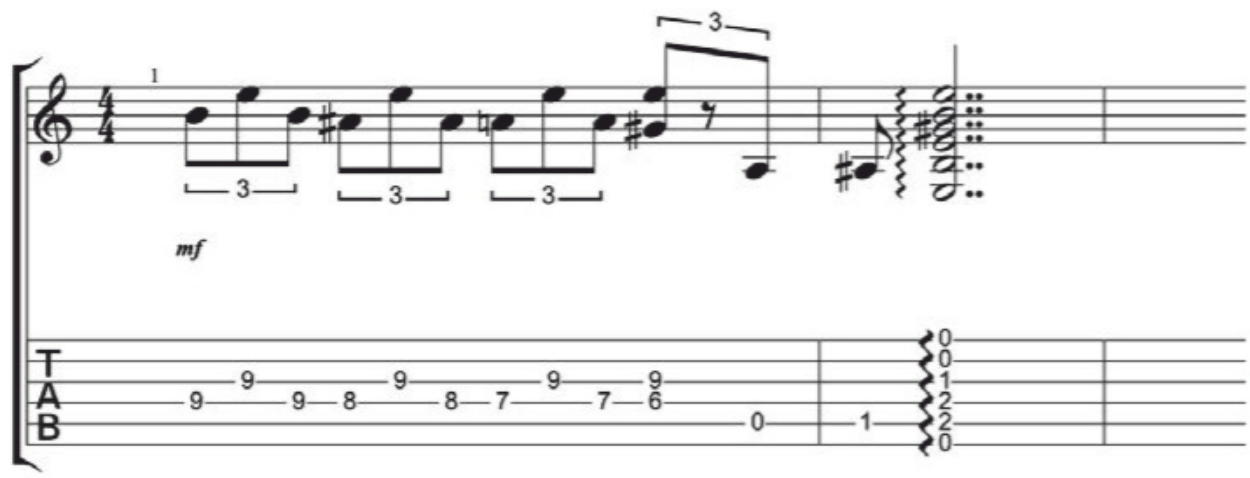
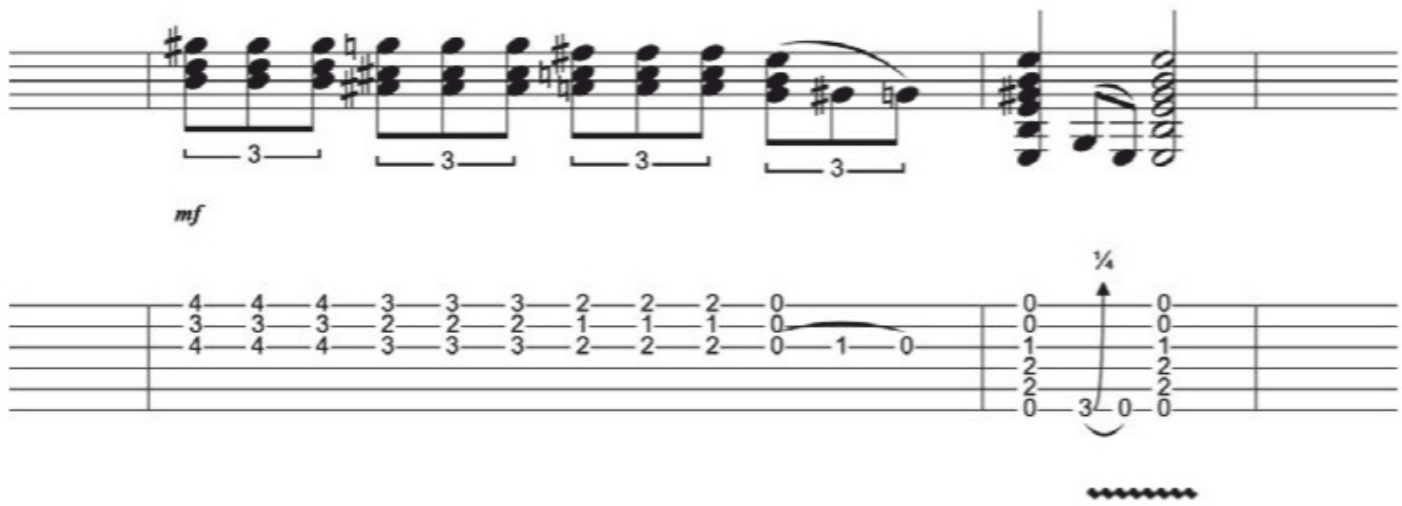
EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3

ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PART FOUR TURNAROUNDS

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

In the fourth part of our essential guide to blues-guitar playing, we show you how to add turnarounds to your rhythms to enliven your blues progressions…

Last time, we looked at some new chords you can throw into your 12-bar blues rhythms to spice up the sound. Here, we'll be looking at turnarounds. A turnaround is something that typically happens over the last two bars of the progression, or sometimes even over all four of the final bars.

In some instances, the turnaround can be used to introduce the track; Eric Clapton's *Before You Accuse Me* being a great example of this. This is a staple of blues music and even if you're not familiar with the terminology, you will certainly know the sound of a turnaround.

The name of this phrase has a very literal meaning, in that you are 'turning around' the repeated rhythmic pattern back to the first chord with a slight melodic variation. A turnaround in blues is a great way to add some depth to the rhythm parts and is also used as a way to end the song.

EXAMPLE 1

A common trait you'll hear in most blues turnaround is a chromatically descending run that stems through part of the turnaround. This example has the chromatic descending note on the fourth (D) string while the 9th fret on the third (G) string is played against each changing note.

EXAMPLE 2

This turnaround is very typical of something you might hear an acoustic-blues player add into their 12-bar blues. We are taking a chord shape and moving it down through four chromatic notes. This follows the same chromatic rule as the previous turnaround, except the whole shape moves. The final shape is played as three open strings, followed by a hammer-on and pull-off on the 1st fret of the third (G) string. This is made up of 8th-note triplets, so you're aiming for three notes per beat.

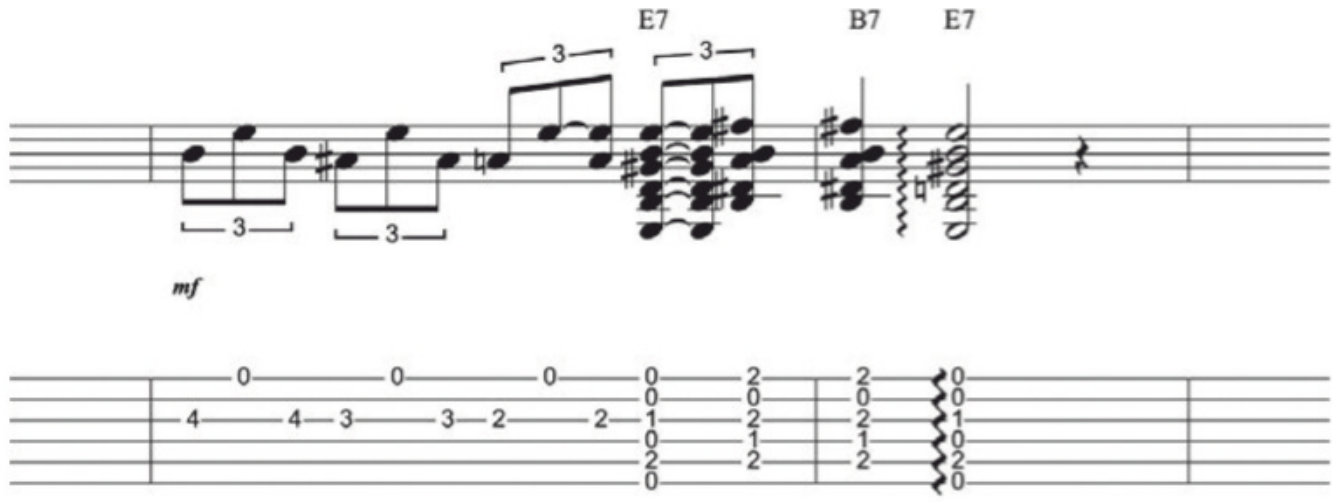
EXAMPLE 3

Blues turnarounds can also take the form of a lead-guitar run. Here's a simple pentatonic run using the E minor pentatonic scale in the open position. There are two notes here which are outside of the scale (we will cover this in more depth in a future lesson).

The 1st fret on the fifth (A) string (The ♭5 interval) and the 1st fret on the third (G) string (The ♭4 interval) are both 'outside' notes that can add a bluesy flavour to a scale.

EXAMPLE 4

EXAMPLE 5



EXAMPLE 6

This run starts with a hammer-on followed by two open strings. The lick then runs through the scale backwards, except when you reach the fifth (A) string, you reverse the flow and play the notes ascending. The final bar ends with a jump from the open sixth (low E) string to the 2nd fret of the fourth (D) string, which is an octave of the sixth (low E) string.

EXAMPLE 4

Here's another chromatic descending turnaround. The chromatic notes are on the third (G) string starting from the 4th fret and alternate between the open first (E) string. We've also integrated some chords in the form of an E7 and B7. The first bar is made up entirely of 8th-note triplets, but the fourth beat is made of chords. The E7 chord takes up two-thirds of the triplet and the B7 takes up the final triplet beat.

EXAMPLE 5

This turnaround is using a concept called contrapuntal motion. Contrapuntal motion is two separate melodic lines moving in opposite directions at the same time. If you look at the low and high notes in this example, the notes on the wound strings are ascending and the notes on the unwound strings are descending.

This type of turnaround is great to add a melodic complexity to your blues progressions. To make this flow, visualise each two-note group as a separate chord shape, so your hand will reform for each note. Start off slow to get the finger patterns and the flow tight.

EXAMPLE 6

This turnaround is the same as Example 5, but due to the nature of the shape of this turnaround, it is an easy one to transpose into different keys. The only noticeable difference is the shape of the second chord. This is due to the low note in the second chord: in an open position, this note would fall lower than the open string. When you play this in a higher register, you can stick to the shapes here.

TRY IT YOURSELF

When playing through 12-bar patterns in various keys, try to integrate some of these turnaround ideas over the last two bars, or at the end of an entire song's worth. All these turnarounds can be used to simply 'turn around' the progression back to the I chord or end a piece. When using turnarounds to end a piece, slowing down over the course of the turnaround is one great way to finish. Or, if the turnaround resolves at the root chord, you can allow a pause before hitting the root chord one final time.

In the next lesson, we look at some slow-blues progressions using these chords and explore various rhythms and techniques we can apply to make our 12-bar really capture the mood we want. G

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He's taught hundreds of students face-to-face and via the MGR Music platform. To find a qualified guitar tutor in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

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Follow our lesson for some insight into Queen's deceptively sophisticated chord composition

FIGURE 1

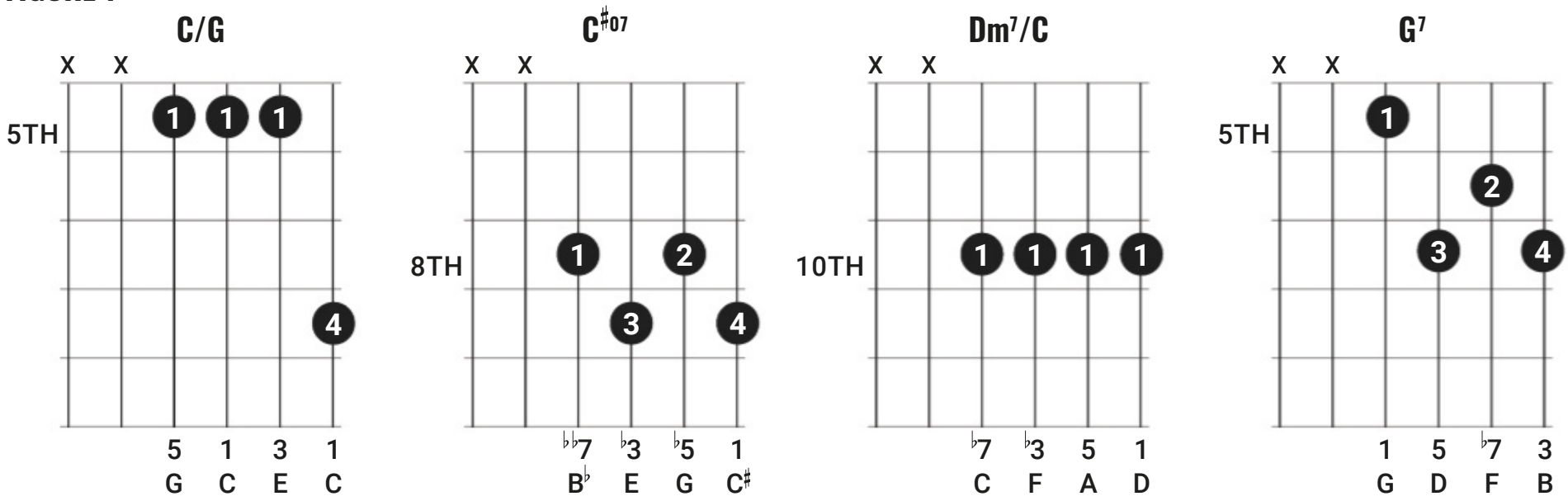
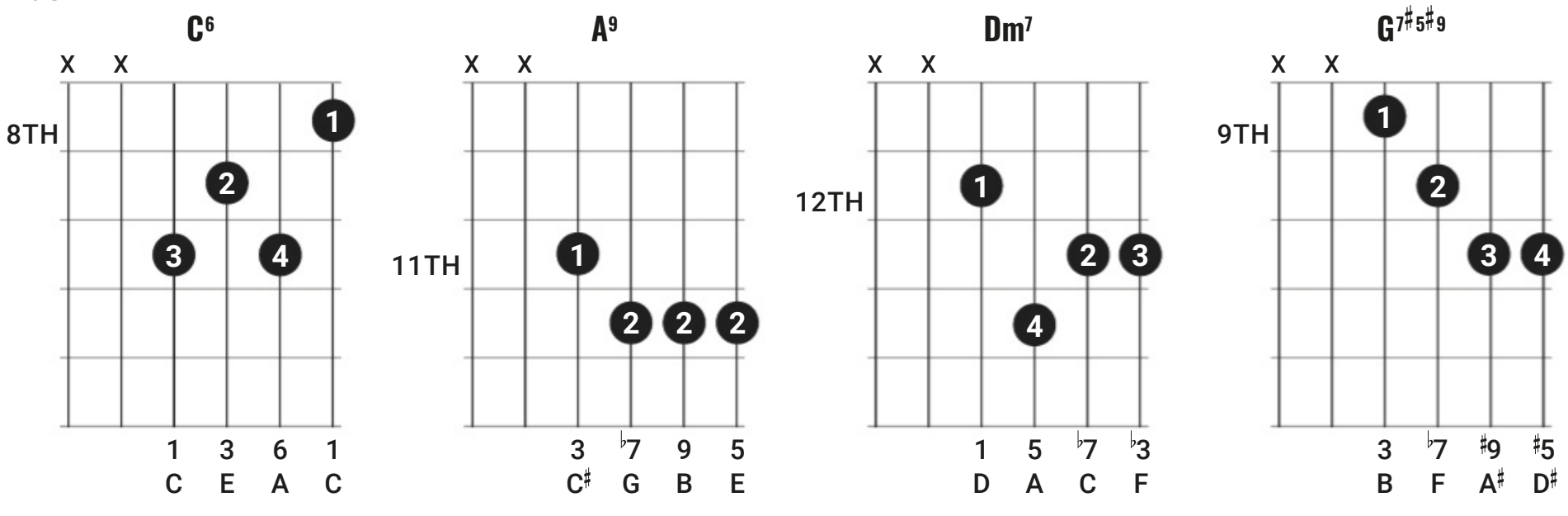


FIGURE 2



CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY QUEEN-STYLE CHORDS PART TWO

WORDS ROD FOGG

Some of Queen's classic recordings seem to hark back to the era of hot jazz, ragtime and vaudeville. We take a look at adapting these unusual, often-piano-led chord sequences for guitar…

In our second instalment looking at chord sequences used by Queen, we find that in among the band's stock-in-trade, there were quirky, original songs that owed much to the music of the 1920s. These include songs such as *Bring Back That Leroy Brown*, *Lazing On A Sunday Afternoon*, *Seaside Rendezvous*, and *Good Old-Fashioned Loverboy*. The chord sequences in these songs will be unfamiliar to most rock players as they are derived from an era when jazz was the dominant force in pop music.

Diving straight in with figure one, we find four chord shapes that are all played on the top four strings of the guitar. Play four downstrokes on each chord for a jazzy approach, looping the pattern around, or even better, go for a Charleston rhythm, playing on the first beat and on the 'and' between the second and third beats of the bar. If you can get round the shapes quickly enough, go for a fast tempo and you'll capture the hot jazz style we are aiming for. Incidentally, the small zero in the second chord is an abbreviation for diminished, so C#°7 means C sharp diminished seven.

Figure 2 is a reworking of figure 1 – giving you another way round a similar set of chords, making an eight-bar sequence altogether. Use whichever finger is on the fourth (D) string to mute the fifth (A) string; it won't matter if you catch it with the pick; avoid hitting the sixth (low E) string altogether. You might notice that the A9 and G7#5#9 chords both omit the root note. This is not unusual with this type of chord progression, where the root note is implied by the movement of the chords; if you want to put the root note in, in both cases it's available on the fifth (A) string.

The six chord shapes in figure 3 also make up a four-bar sequence. Give the first four chords two beats each, and then give the G and A chords a bar each. We are mixing high-position chords with the open fourth (D) string in the bass.

As a variation, you could go back over the D6 and D chords one time and halve the amount of time on the G and A chords. Repeat, and you'll have an eight-bar sequence. We are aiming for the kind of song that often has an AABA structure, so repeat this eight-bar A section before we head into the B section.

Cue figure 4 and the B section, also known as the bridge or the middle eight. Strangely, a middle eight isn't always eight bars long, but in this case, if you play the first three chords for two bars each, then E7 and B♭7 for two beats each – before giving

FIGURE 3

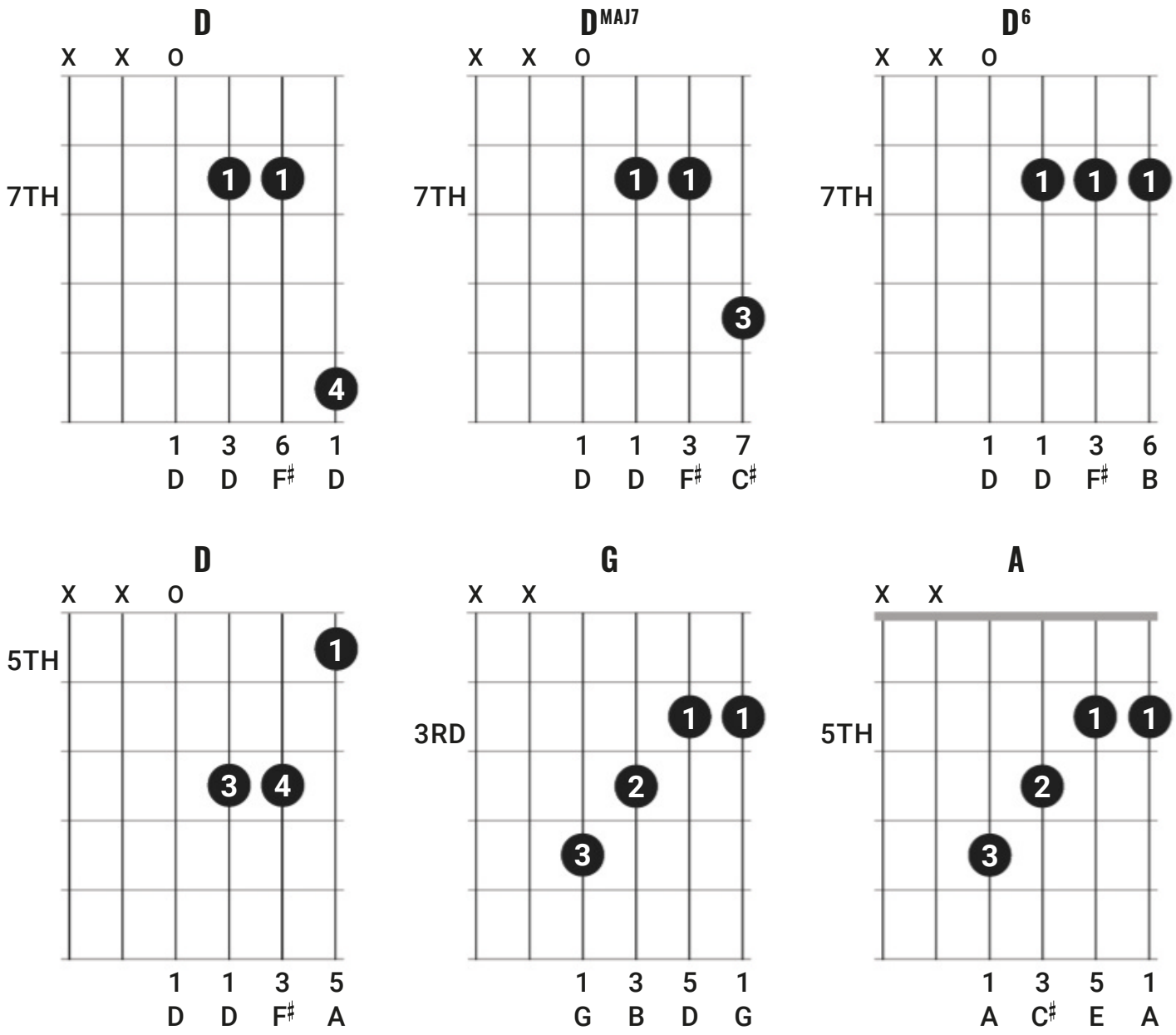


FIGURE 4

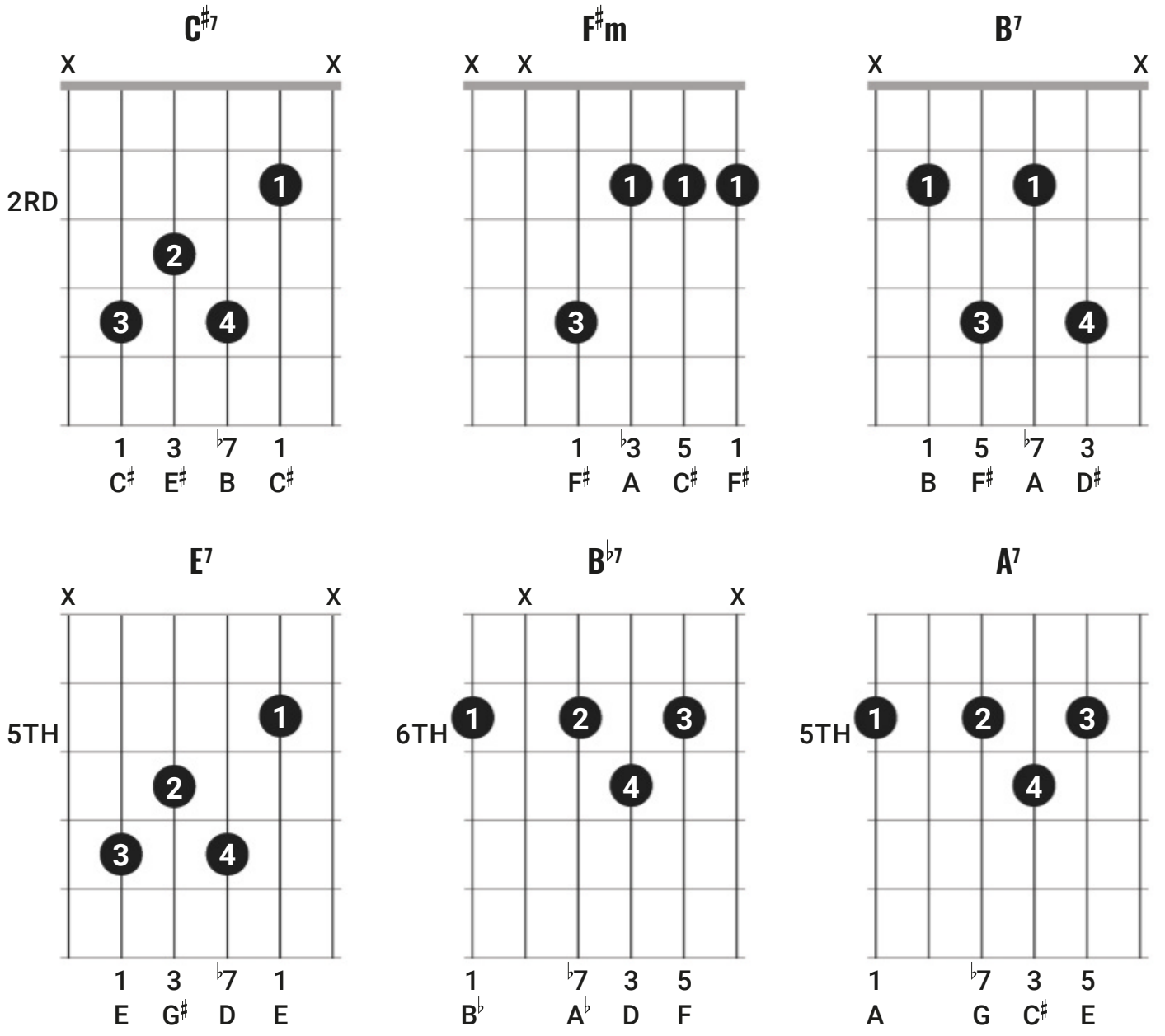
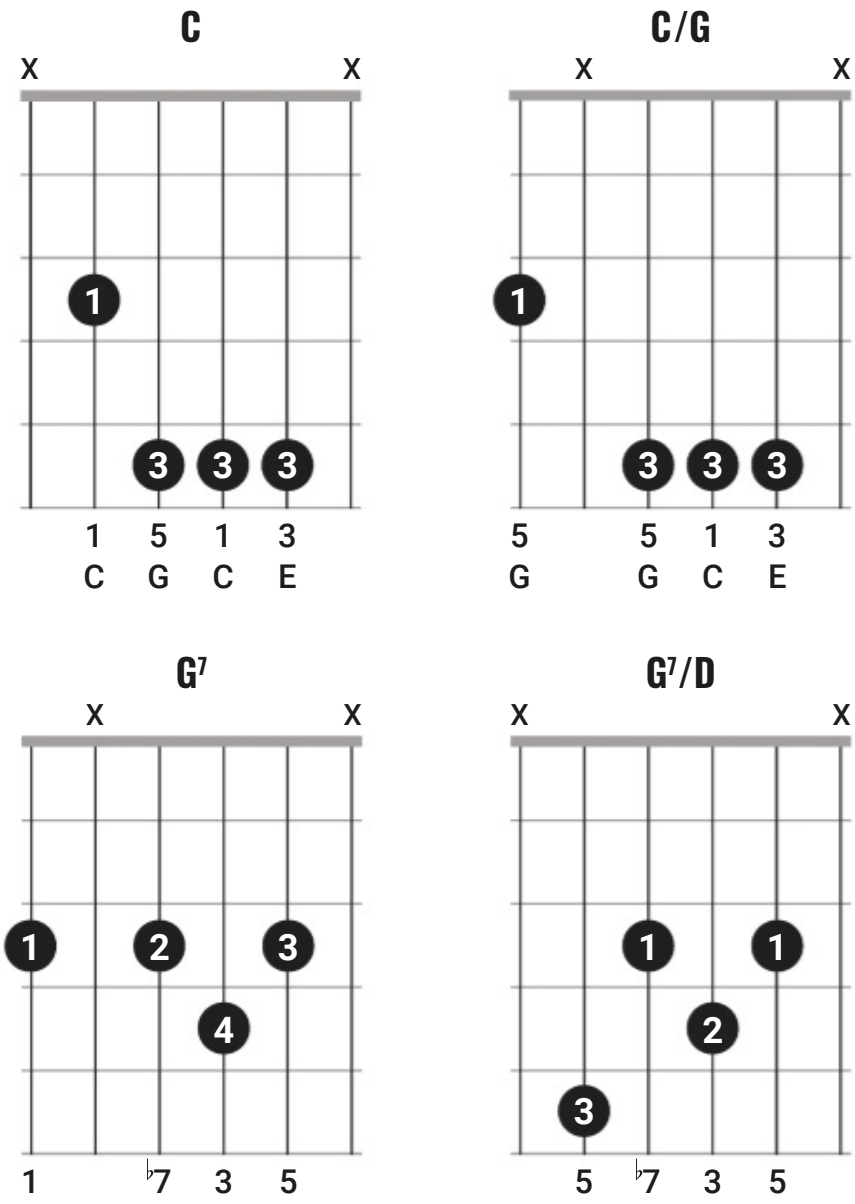


FIGURE 5



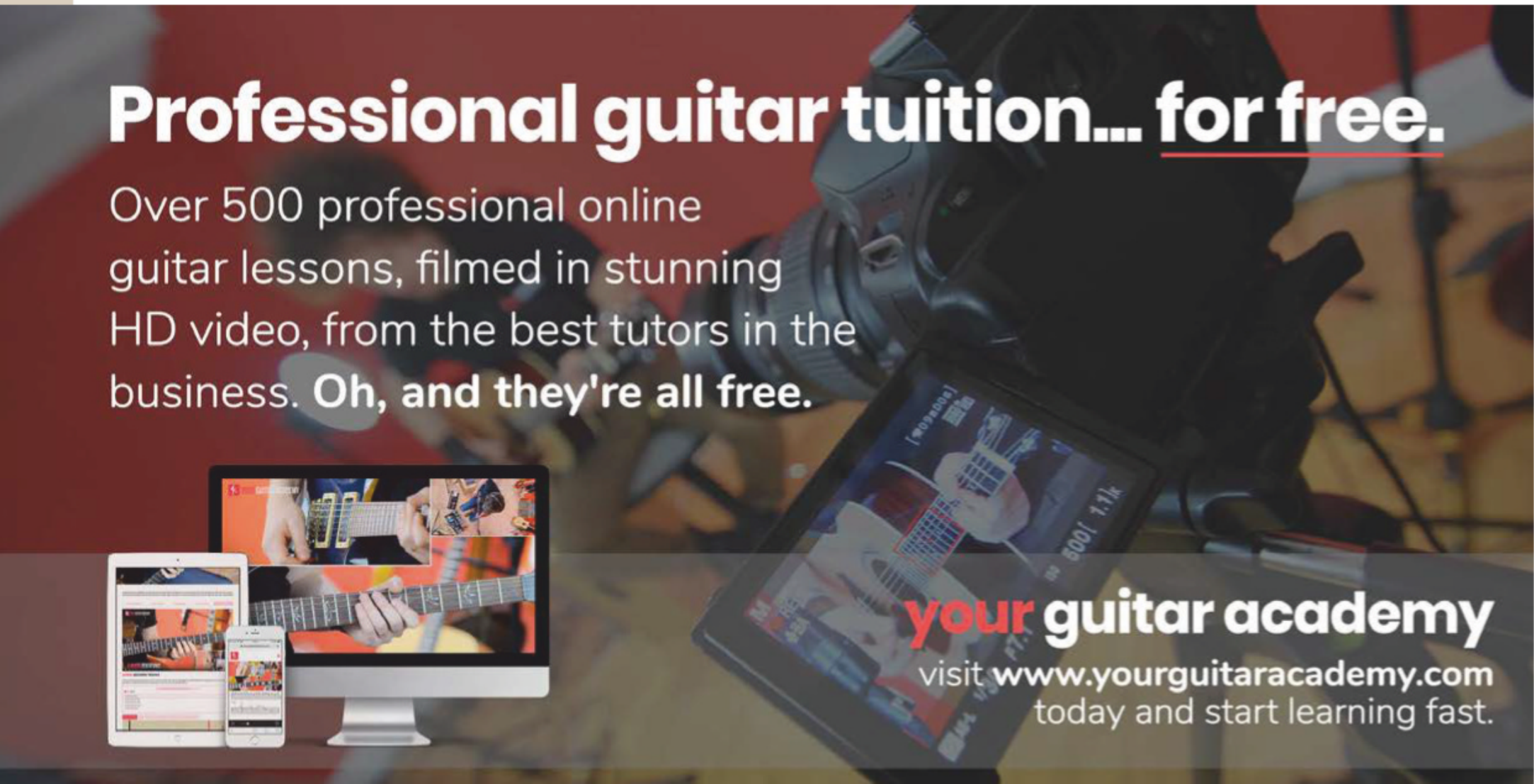
A7 a whole bar to itself, possibly as a held chord – it will come out at eight bars.

At this point, you go back to the A section to complete the AABA structure. Jazz players often solo over the entire form on songs like these, but given Queen's rock-band credentials, it's more likely that Brian May would just grab a melodic eight-bar solo over either section. Give it a try, but you might find that those dependable minor-pentatonic shapes don't quite deliver the goods, especially on that tricky middle eight.

Guitarists can do a good impersonation of the 'oom-pah' rhythm often found in early jazz. Take a look at figure 5, which starts with a C major chord followed by a slash chord, which is C major with a G bass. The idea here is that you pick the C bass on the first beat of the bar, and hit the other three notes of the chord with a downstroke on the second beat.

You should find that using the third finger as a barre naturally mutes the open first (E) string, which is what we want. For the third beat, pick the G bass note from C/G and strum the other three notes on the fourth beat. Perhaps it's more 'boom-chack' than 'oom-pah', but you'll get the idea.

If you can't hold down three strings with the third finger, use fingers two, three and four instead – don't feel bad, some people just don't have the flexibility in the tip joint of their third finger! Now move on to the G7 chords – alternating between G and D in the bass, with the strummed chords on beats two and four. Play two bars of C, two bars of G7, or any other pattern you can think of, and repeat. Try a jaunty tempo – and your seaside rendezvous awaits. **G**



TALKBOX

KRISTIAN NAIRN

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

Best known as Hodor from *Game Of Thrones*, the DJ and guitarist talks extra-long guitar straps, platform boots and trading cows for Jacksons…

The moment it all started…
"My mum forced me to learn piano when I was a child, which in hindsight, I'm really grateful for. But around the early 90s, I remember sitting up until about 4am watching *Raw Power* on ITV and I had just never heard Megadeth before… they had such a unique sound. The guitars were so tight and the rhythms were so crazy, I just thought, 'I want to do that!'"

The one that got away…
"I grew up on a farm, and my grandfather gave me one of his cattle that he'd raised. He sold one and gave me the money for it – and a cow is quite valuable! And then all of a sudden I realised that because of the cow, I had enough money to buy my first Jackson. To this day, it's the best guitar I've ever played. But I upgraded to a Strat, as I was heavily into Yngwie Malmsteen, and you have to have the Strat. But I've never had another guitar like that Jackson."

I couldn't live without my…
"I've got an ESP, which is really good for playing metal on, and I've also got a Charvel, a little Dinky thing with a glittery finish – I'm really into glittery guitars, I don't know why! But they both have a really different playing style and different sounds, so it's good to have that variation."

My signature model would be…
"Well, funnily enough, there's one in the works! There's a small guitar company in the UK called Carillion. He approached me, and he's making a pretty awesome axe for me. It may be themed towards something that I'm well known for. You'll have to use your imagination as to what that is! I'm really excited to see how that turns out."

The first thing I play…
"*Satch Boogie*. And then I'm also into my harmonic stuff, so I might play *Decadence Dance* by Extreme. My interest in metal basically stops at around 1990-something!"

The best advice I've ever been given…
"Don't be afraid to diversify. I was determined to be a guitar player growing up and I worked damn hard! But I realised that it wasn't going to go in that direction, because the stuff I wanted to play wasn't popular at that time. I liked electronic music as well, but at first I was like, 'No!' But then I just thought, 'Why? What's the point in hampering yourself?' And I never really wanted to be an actor, and then …*Thrones* happened! So it's important to hold on to your dreams, but don't hold on too tightly."

My Spinal Tap moment…
"I was hosting one of those videoke things, and I was wearing a massive pair of platform boots… and obviously, someone of my size doesn't need to wear platform boots. And I was standing at the top of this huge auditorium… and I managed to fall down the entire flight of stairs. It was *so* painful… but it was also incredibly funny. I remember picking myself up at the bottom and thinking I had the choice to laugh or cry: I just had to laugh, man."

My guilty pleasure…
"I don't feel guilty about anything – I don't care! I've been to concerts by everyone from Deicide to Take That! I don't think there's much in between that I'd feel guilty about."

I wish I was in…
"You might think I'd say Megadeth, but I don't think I'd enjoy it. I think Dave would be an exacting commander! I'd have loved to have been one of Ozzy Osbourne's guitar players, and he always picks the most amazing and unique players. I've always had quite a unique way of playing guitar; because my hands are so big, I've developed different ways of doing things."

The first thing on my rider…
"One of the things I need on my rider is an extra-long guitar strap! Because there's nothing worse than a seven-foot man, a short strap and a guitar that already looks small! It ends up looking like a ukulele." G

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